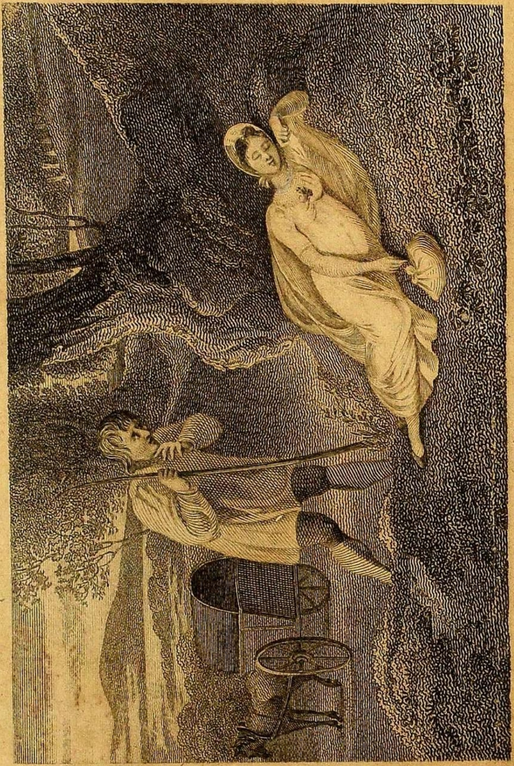

DOMESTIC SCENES.

FROM THE GERMAN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

AGNES DE LILIEN,

STATIRA, RESTLESS MATRON, &c. &c.

Domestic happiness, thou only bliss
Of Paradise that has surviv'd the fall!
Though few now taste thee unimpair'd and pure,
Or, tasting, long enjoy thee; too infirm,
Or too incautious to preserve thy sweets
Unmixt with drops of bitter, which neglect
Or temper sheds into the crystal cup.

COWPER.

VOL. I.

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DOMESTIC SCENES.

MARIA MILLER.

CHAP. I.

MARIA MILLER was the only child of a middling tradesman in L——, his pride and the comfort of his age: her beauty soon distinguished her from the other girls of her rank, and her father spared no expence to elevate his darling above them by a careful education.

Maria was mistress of various accomplishments, and loved domestic life. In the retirement she lived in, her under-

standing had formed itself by reading useful books, and her sentiments were ennobled and refined by reflection and nature. She learned (although, to avoid the ridicule of her equals, she did so privately) to play on the harpsichord, which she accompanied with her soft melodious voice; she likewise excelled in almost every female employment, and an amiable timidity heightened the value of the talents she possessed, which she only practised to please her father, and fill up her lonely hours in a useful and agreeable manner. Her days glided away in a happy concealment!

Without any knowledge of the world, and its alluring pleasures, Maria had not acquired that high polish which is only to be found in the elevated ranks of life, that dazzles the eye without touching the heart; but in her whole being reigned, with irresistible power, the innate purity and cordiality of uncorrupted, and yet cultivated, nature; which event the most

insensible

insensible mind could not behold with indifference.

When she had attained her eighteenth year, her father said to her—" Maria, it is time to think about settling you. I am growing old and ailing, and should die with a heavy heart if I was to leave you without a protector. Tell me, my dear child, if you know any man with whom you think you could be happy? I will not force, nor even persuade you; but if you have found one, whom you esteem, deserving of your love, tell me, and, by doing so, rejoice my old heart with your confidence, and the satisfaction of knowing that you are settled agreeable to your own inclination."

Maria threw her arms around her tender parent's neck, and replied, with a tear and a crimson blush—" Do not, my dear father, speak so seriously about the time in which I am to lose you—you pain me exceedingly by doing so! Not the thought of having a protector after your

death, an event which I hope is very—very distant, but to obey you, I will inform you of my sentiments without disguise. My cousin Edward is an agreeable, and, I believe, a good young man; I feel the sincerest friendship for him; and as I must marry some time or other, I would rather give my hand to him than any one else."

"O Maria!" exclaimed the delighted father, "you have fulfilled, without knowing it, the first, the most ardent wish of my heart. It has long been my intention to propose it to you, and now you have so kindly anticipated my intention!"—He clasped his daughter in his arms, and tenderly embraced her as he pronounced these words.

Edward was the son of his deceased brother, a sensible worthy youth: Maria and he had been bred up together from their childhood, and the unrestrained freedom of that happy age had early cemented the bands of the tenderest friendship betwixt

betwixt them. He had learned huntsmanship, his mind was as pure as the element he almost constantly lived in, and his affection for Maria as sincere as was ever felt by man. She had even, in the days of their early youth, occupied his ittle heart, and his love augmented with is years. When nothing could tame the ild and headstrong boy, Maria's gentle ooks and soft persuasive voice never failed aving the desired effect; even a friendly ook or word of her's operated more power-lly on him than any thing else, and guided all his actions and wishes. Maria vas likewise sincerely attached to her ousin; but her inclination was free from assion, and was caused by her thorough nowledge of his heart, esteem for the nany good qualities he possessed, habi-ual intimacy, and the ignorance of her guiltless mind, that had not yet felt the power of love.

Old Miller did not long delay informing his nephew of his daughter's declaration.

Edward hastened to Maria, and the confirmation of his happiness from her lips threw him into a transport of joy.—" O Maria!" exclaimed he, in an ecstasy, " how rich am I in your love! When—O when will you be mine?"

" Not yet," replied Maria; " you must see more of the world first, Edward, tha you may be better able to relish the com forts of domestic life. Don't you remember," continued she—" I do so perfectly—how you, while we used to take our Sunday's walk by the river side, when yo saw the wide and fruitful prospect spread out before you, how you used to gaze and keep your eyes rivetted on it, and often asked me, although we were bu children at the time, if I did not long to see, as much as you did, what was doing on the other side of the dusky mountains?—or how you used to tremble when you heard a postillion smack his whip at a distance—or, when a light travelling carriage rolled rapidly past us along the

road? How uncomfortable you used to feel at such times! Tears frequently started into your eyes, and you used to be so cross, that every effort which my affection could devise, were frequently tried in vain for an hour or two, before I was able to put you into a good humour again. Go, therefore, and look about you for a couple of years, and then——"

A gentle sigh stifled the conclusion of her speech, and her cheeks were tinged with a faint blush.

It was settled that Edward should attend a Prince, who had given him several proofs of his friendship, on his travels for a year or two; and at his return, when he was in possession of the ranger's place that was promised him at the expiration of that time, he was to receive the hand of his lovely bride—a prospect that opened a view of Paradise to his ravished sight.

O ye delightful visions that love and expectation form, why, ah! why are ye so seldom realized?

Edward made the necessary preparations for his journey. "Farewell, my dear friend," said Maria to him, at the moment of his departure; "remember me, when we are far distant from each other, and return to me as good and amiable as you are at present!"

"Farewell, my dear, dear Maria!" replied Edward, in a trembling voice, as he put a ring, set with his hair, upon her finger, and large drops of tears rushed into his honest eyes.—"Will you permit me to write to you?"

"Write to my father," said Maria, returning his embrace.

"I am ever, ever thine!" exclaimed Edward. He then pressed her once more to his palpitating bosom, and hastened away, as ordained by Fate.

Maria stood sorrowfully at the window, and followed him with her eyes till he was quite out of sight. Her whole being was filled with the warmest interest for him: she had never felt the value of the numberless

berless good qualities he possessed, and of his integrity, so forcibly as she did at that moment; nor had her heart ever felt so warmly inclined in his favour. She fancied she still saw him, as he had just stood before her in the agonizing moment of separation; large drops of tears rolling down his sunburnt cheeks, and the timid look that rested on his face, which silently seemed to implore her constancy.

"Yes, I shall be happy with him!" exclaimed she, and her eyes remained fixed on the spot where she had seen the last glimpse of him: she at last sat down upon the window-seat, and sank into a train of serious reflections.

Maria's fancy had often, in her lonely hours, created an ideal of perfection which by no means resembled Edward. She had adorned the being her imagination formed with every manly beauty, both of mind and person, and that was the object which her heart secretly and fondly cherished.

rished. But ah! where was she to find the mortal who resembled it?

"O how I should adore him," would she frequently say to herself, with a sigh, "was I ever to meet with a man who is like the picture my mind has formed!"—But her wish was vain. "I see he is not to be found in this world," said she, peevishly; "I will therefore endeavour to erase the delusive vision from my mind!"

When Edward paid his addresses to her, with all the warmth of sincere affection, the chimera grew weaker and weaker by degrees, and she strove, with all her might, to persuade herself that what she sought was no where to be found. Edward's worth, so devoid of pretensions, and yet so evident that it was impossible not to perceive it, even in his most trifling actions, his noble, manly sentiments, and the warm and sincere passion he felt for her, inspired her with gratitude and friendship: she endured his tenderness, although

she did not return it, and looked forward to the time that was to unite them with hope and content.

Her father came into the room and interrupted her train of thoughts, which were occupied with distant events. There was a little bustle in the street, which she had not remarked. "Look, Maria!" said he—"I wonder who the gentleman is that is riding by."

Maria turned her head towards the window, and perceived a handsome young man, in a plain hunting dress, attended by several servants, mounted on a spirit chesnut horse, by the side of which ran large Newfoundland dog, who expressed his joy by vociferous barking. She looked thoughtlessly down; a poor old man asked charity at the time; the stranger stopped his horse, and, with a gentleness in his voice and looks, with some kind words that exceeded the value of his gift, threw a piece of gold into the beggar's hat, and then gallopped on.

The strange gentleman appeared to be about six or seven and twenty years of age; his form was remarkably elegant, and the sensibility that beamed from his eyes seemed to contend with the fire of youth; gravity, mingled with the smiles so natural at his age, dwelt on his lips; his forehead was high, and beautifully shaped; his regular features were embellished by the gentle melancholy that appeared on them; his silky locks had freed themselves from the trammels of art, and waved negligently and gracefully over his k and shoulders; and his dark arched ebrows gave a noble and commanding r to the *tout ensemble* of the serious miling countenance.

Maria went into the garden: her father ived in a small neat house in the suburbs of the town, the garden of which commanded a prospect of the beautiful country that surrounded L——. She had always before loved to sit alone in the pleasing dusky shade that her favourite

honeysuckle arbour afforded; but that day, for the first time, she found it too gloomy and solitary. A sad foreboding rendered itself master of her mind; nor was it in her power, much as she strove to do so, to conjecture what could be the reason of the strange anarchy that reigned within her.

The sight of the handsome stranger had half obliterated the remembrance of Edward's departure from her mind, and she continually asked herself who he could be?—"What is it to me who he is?" replied she hastily, as she sat down to her work, with the hope that employment would restore her mind to its wonted serenity. But nothing that she took in hand succeeded that day, which she observed with vexation and discontent; and she felt so oppressed, and every thing that surrounded her so gloomy and confined, that she jumped up, and hastily unlocked a gate that opened into the street, with the intention of asking a neighbour

neighbour to come and keep her company; but, just as she was stepping out, the Newfoundland dog, that she had seen with the stranger, rushed, as if it was frightened, towards her. It seemed to have lost its master, and approached Maria with the familiarity of an old acquaintance.

Maria, whose gentle heart abounded with "the milk of human kindness," for brutes as well as her fellow-creatures, received the poor fugitive in a friendly manner, and shut the gate, without recollecting the reason of her opening it. The dog had a silver collar on, on which the letters C. W. were neatly engraven.

"Look!" said Maria to her father, who at that moment approached her, "here is the gentleman's dog who rode by our house some time ago. It must have lost scent of its master; we will keep it till it is advertised, that we may be certain the poor creature is restored to its rightful owner."

The old man approved of his daughter's proposal, and Maria charged herself with the care of the beautiful animal, who soon gratefully returned the attachment she felt for it.

CHAP. II.

SEVERAL days elapsed, in which Maria often thought of Edward, but still oftener of the handsome stranger, whose image was deeply imprinted on her mind. She fancied she continually saw him before her, at the moment when the mild beam of benevolence gave fresh lustre to the brightness of his eyes, and her fancy added the most perfect features, (for she had

only had a transient glimpse of his face), and strongly engraved them on the tablets of her heart.

One morning her father entered the room with a newspaper in his hand— "There, read," said he—"your favourite is claimed."

Maria took the paper, and her eyes hastily glanced over the lines, till she found the name she sought for, and a crimson blush overspread her face, as she pronounced the words—"Count Charles Woodmar!" She looked mournfully at the dog she was grown so fond of, who lay asleep at her feet. "We must part!" said she, patting his head—"but how glad I should be to keep you!"

"Keep that great beast!" replied her father, staring at her. "Why, what would you do with it? No, no, return it, by all means, and the first pretty little spaniel or greyhound I see, I will buy for you. Such a dog is much fitter for a girl than that."

"He

"He is a Count then!" said Maria to herself, as soon as she was alone, and a deep sigh involuntarily swelled her bosom. "How handsome he is! I think he is the handsomest man I ever saw in my life! Even Edward, who is well-looking, would appear ordinary, if they were to stand together! And how good he must be!" continued she, in a trembling voice; "for he spoke so kindly, and was so willing to relieve the wants of the beggar who asked alms of him—but," added she, peevishly, "what is he, or what he does, to me? or——"

She seemed vexed with herself for dwelling so long on the subject, and stopped abruptly in the midst of her monologue. She then ran to her father as fast as she could, without being able to assign a reason for her excessive haste, and desired him to inform the Count, as soon as he could, where his dog was, that he might send for it.

It was done, and a few hours after somebody knocked at the room door, where Maria and her father were at dinner.—"Come in," said she, and one of the Count's grooms entered.

"My Lord, Count Woodmar, is very much obliged to you, Sir," said he to old Miller, who kept his seat in his easy chair, "for taking care of his favourite dog, who he loves as well as his eyes, and begs you will accept of this," (attempting to press five louis d'ors into his hand as he spoke) "as a trifling mark of his gratitude."

"His thanks are due to my daughter," replied Miller; "for I did not trouble myself about the dog, as she, from the first, charged herself with the care of it."

The man turned around, bowed to Maria, and offered her the money. Her lovely cheeks glowed like fire, she felt herself humbled, and seized with a peculiar kind of shame—"Tell your Lord," said she,

she, "that a recompence is not necessary to induce me to do my duty. The dog is his, and I will return it to him without being paid for doing so. Your Lord," continued she, in a timid manner, "seems to know how to make the best use of his money, by kindly relieving the wants of the poor with his abundance; tell him, therefore, with my humble respects, that I beg he will apply the sum he intended for me to such purposes."

She then caressed Pallas (the dog was called so), bid him farewell, and left the room. The man stared at her, till she was out of sight, with a look of astonishment; for he had never before seen so much grace and beauty united in the same person.

George returned to the Count, and after he had informed him in a circumstantial manner, how he had executed the commission he was charged with, broke out in a number of encomiums on Maria's beauty.

The

The Count, a young libertine, was curious to see a person who George (whose taste he knew might be depended on in matters of that kind) extolled to the skies. "She was too proud to accept my money," replied he—"perhaps she will not refuse my thanks. I will call on her for a moment to-morrow, and see if your praises are exaggerated or not."

Maria's mind, which had been in a state of continual perturbation ever since she had first seen the Count, was much calmer that day than it had been several of the preceding ones. She thought seriously of Edward and futurity; she felt contented with her lot, and yet a gentle melancholy seized hold of her mind, and filled her eyes with tears. She, in idea, adorned her Edward with all the good qualities he possessed (and they were many), and placed him next to the handsome Count. By doing so, she fancied she should best be able to wean herself from thinking of a man who she had never seen but once, and

and even of whom she had then had but a momentary glance. But transient as the apparition was, it, as if by the power of enchantment, was ever uppermost in her thoughts; and she determined, let it cost what it would, to conquer what her heart condemned as a weakness.

At the moment her mind was engaged in this manner, she heard somebody walk lightly along the passage towards the room she was in, and Pallas's well-known bark; and a moment after a gentle tap at the door. She started from her chair, and stood undetermined, when the knock was repeated. She opened the door, and—the Count and his dog stood before her.

Pallas immediately rushed upon her with such violence, that he almost threw her down, and expressed his joy at seeing her again, by loud barking. She stooped and stroked him in a kind familiar manner; and the Count, who found her much handsomer than he expected, addressed her in the following terms:—

"Forgive

"Forgive me, lovely girl, for coming myself to thank you for your kindness to poor Pallas! I feel how much I am indebted to you."

He stopped, but his eyes continued to speak.

Maria blushed, and cast down her's in a sweet confusion: she attempted to answer him, and at last, with difficulty, articulated, in a low voice—"My Lord—I—" and then stopped, unable to proceed. Fortunately for her, she was relieved by the presence of her father, who at that moment entered the room, and was very agreeably surprised at the sight of his noble visitor. He invited the Count to sit down, and ordered Maria to go into the cellar and fetch a bottle of wine, and bring glasses with her, a message that was extremely welcome to her at that moment. Woodmar followed her with his eyes till she was out of the room.

Maria was as beautiful as an angel; her neat homely attire, without enviously concealing

cealing her charms, did not add to them, and she was too lovely to stand in need of the aid of dress to please. The unaffected modesty that her easy-blushing cheek expressed, and the unstudied grace that attended all her motions, gave, in the Count's opinion, fresh lustre to her charms.

Wine is apt to open the heart of man, at least that was the case with Miller, who seldom drank any; and its effects were highly serviceable to the Count, for the old man grew talkative and merry.

Woodmar possessed the insinuating art, which is only to be learnt in the school of high and fashionable life, of accommodating himself to every thing, and being all to all men; and he succeeded so well, that, greatly as Miller in general disliked new acquaintance, he soon threw off all restraint to him, and behaved with the familiarity of an old friend.

This high varnish, which characterizes the man of fashion, this polish, which is only

only to be acquired in courts, and in a life of dissipation, in which, alas! the greatest dignity of man, the simplicity and morality of his mind are too often stifled, is frequently dangerous to the honest unsuspecting tradesman, who does not suspect the depths that are concealed under a clear and shining surface.

Maria modestly seated herself at a little distance from the table where her father and the Count were drinking; but her face glowed like fire, when she heard the former tell Woodmar, with the good-natured loquacity so natural to age when it is in high spirits, of Maria being Edward's bride: he at the same time pointed to his picture, which hung under the looking-glass, then filled the glasses up to the brim, with these words—"We will drink his health in a bumper!—here's to him!" and, taking up his glass, emptied it in a draught.

"With all my heart!" replied the Count, who, whilst he drank his wine, which he

did

did very slowly, kept his eyes fixed on Maria with serious and enquiring looks.

He then rose from his seat, and walked towards the picture. Maria perceiving his intention, and conscious of having neglected it for several days, stepped hastily towards it, and wiped off the dust.

Woodmar stood thoughtfully with folded arms, and contemplated the happy lover for some time; then suddenly turning towards Maria, in whose countenance he fancied he perceived the marks of secret sorrow, said to her, in a low voice—"Do you love this Edward?"

"I greatly esteem him," was her reply.

"You esteem, but do not love him!" returned the Count, in a more pressing manner.

"Indeed I wish him as well as I do myself," was the blushing girl's answer.

"I conjure you, by the happiness of my future life," continued the Count, with increasing warmth, "to be more explicit—

tell me if you love this man?" pointing to the picture.

Maria's eyes were fixed on the ground, and she remained silent.

Woodmar's looks grew more and more expressive, his eyes sparkled, his usual colour was heightened, and he gently pressed Maria's hand; but recollecting himself, he let it drop, and, assuming a look of indifference, returned to the old man.

Maria was so much agitated that she was hardly able to breathe: she hurried out of the room, and as soon as she was in the fresh air, burst into a flood of tears, and bitterly reproached herself for the absurdity of her behaviour.—" O how like a fool I acted!" exclaimed she, clasping her hands in an agony—" must not the Count think that Edward is as indifferent to me as a stranger? Why didn't I say I loved him? or—don't I love him?" continued she, after a pause. " Have not his attentions, constancy, and love, been able to gain

gain mine?" She reflected on the different sensations her mind had lately felt: the longer she did so, the plainer the real situation of her heart appeared to her; and she at last owned to herself, with shame and sorrow, that the too handsome and accomplished Count was dearer to her than the good and amiable Edward. She was very angry with herself for entertaining such sentiments, which she regarded as highly sinful, and was therefore resolved to conquer them, let it cost what it would. She hurried into her own room, and fetched the ring that Edward had given her, which she put upon her finger, with the expectation of its proving a talisman. —"I was near going astray," said she; "forgive me, Edward. But this ring, the token of your love, shall remind me, should I ever be tempted to err again, of what I owe you and myself."

She dried her eyes as she pronounced these words, and returned to the room, where she found her father alone. He

told her that the Count had just left him, and that he had assured him, when he took leave, that his company was so highly agreeable to him, that he proposed, if he would permit it, to call on him often.

The knowledge of the real state of our mind does not always give us pleasure, nor did Maria's reflections afford her any: her present situation appeared to her in a very different light to what it had done before; for it was evident that she felt nothing but friendship for the man it was her duty to love; and her inclination for the Count, if it was not love, she was certain would lead to it. She continually fancied she saw him with Edward's picture in his hand, and the penetrating look he directed to her at that moment, which seemed desirous to read the innermost thoughts of her heart. The pleasing perturbation of spirits always returned, when she recollected the pressure of his hand, that she felt when she received it, which then thrilled her heart with joy: she

she incessantly recalled to her mind the harmonious sound of his voice, the irresistible softness of his eyes, the affecting dejection his face expressed, and then wondered at her not being able to efface the remembrance that she took such pains to imprint still deeper on her memory.

"The great ladies are happy," would she often say to herself, when she was alone, and her thoughts occupied with Woodmar—"they may listen to him when he speaks of love; they may hope, but I—I do not complain of the lowness of my situation, nor of my fate, for—am I not Edward's bride? I am certain I shall be happy with him.—My wishes are foolish and presumptuous, and I will strive to forget them."

She endeavoured to do so: her efforts cost her many sighs, and tears that flowed in secret; but, in spite of her endeavours, the idea of Woodmar continued to take still deeper root in her heart.

Three tedious days were passed since his visit. "He will never come again," said she to her father, in a sorrowful manner.

"Who do you mean, my dear?" said the old man.

She did not make him any reply, but with a forced smile, turned from him, and sat down to her harpsichord, to try if music would not change the deep depression of her mind into a gentle melancholy. Her father, who attributed her lowness of spirits to Edward's absence, left her alone, and went to his work; and a few minutes after the room door flew open, she turned her head around, and the paleness of her cheeks was suddenly changed into a deep crimson, which added fresh lustre to her beautiful eyes, when she saw the Count, who, with a polite and well-turned compliment, on his finding her so agreeably employed, tenderly pressed her hand to his heart.

CHAP.

pretensions to your friendship? You are an ornament to the rank you belong to, which I own, with shame, I till now overlooked with indifference; but you endear it to me. Will you, therefore, when I am wearied with the frivolity of a Court, and scenes of tasteless dissipation, sometimes permit me to spend an hour in your company, that I may admire your virtues, and lament the unfortunate circumstances that separate us?"

Maria felt herself violently affected by this speech. "O, my Lord!" said she, "what advantage can the friendship of such a poor unmeaning girl as I am afford you?"

"Of much!—of very much!" replied he, with energy. "It is impossible for me to express the violence of the impression that you have made on me, and which I am sure will prove as lasting as my life. Let us act with the sincerity to each other that becomes friends; and therefore tell me, without disguise, if the promi-

have given to Edward is not revocable—if the band that unites you cannot be dissolved?"

Maria was silent, and burst into tears.

"Is there no possibility," continued he, "to break an engagement which your keeping, as your tears inform me, will render you unhappy?"

Maria summoned up all the resolution she was mistress of to her assistance, and replied, with some degree of firmness—"My Lord, I am Edward's bride! My choice was a voluntary one, and he deserves the esteem I feel for, and the confidence I place in him. My future happiness depends on him, and it cannot be placed in safer hands. These tears—O my Lord! do not despise me for revealing what I perhaps ought to have kept eternally concealed in my own bosom—these tears are not caused by my repenting having promised my hand to Edward—... on account of my feeling that I should

should have been able to render him happier, if I had never seen you."

The Count clasped her to his bosom, and exclaimed, in a transport of joy—"Is it possible? Is what I hardly ventured to hope really true? Am I not indifferent to my Maria?"

Maria, entirely thrown off her guard by his tumultuous love, concealed her blushing face in his bosom, and only answered with tears.

"Have I then," continued he, "at last found the treasure which I have vainly sought for so many years—love in an innocent and cultivated mind?"

He raised his eyes to heaven with a look of gratitude, and Maria extricated herself from his encircling arms—only to return into them again.

"Yes," said she, at last, with emphasis and glowing cheeks—"yes, I love you, but I will conquer my inclination, for it is criminal!"

But ah! how frail is the human heart! at the moment when the sacred flame of love first blazes in it, how weak, how vain are the efforts of reason to quench the fire that devours it!—It was really Maria's intention to do what she said, but her lover's embraces soon altered it. A new world, that shone in unclouded brightness, presented itself to her view, and diffused a roseate hue over every future prospect of her life. She fancied that the former part of her unobserved existence could only be termed a blank, and that it was not till love had received her into the pleasing shade of its myrtles, that she could properly be said to live.

A happy hour glided unperceived away, and the lovers were obliged to separate.

"Farewell, dearest Count!" was what she said at parting.

"Adieu, my own Maria!" was his reply, and a thousand kisses sealed the bond of love. He at last tore himself from her arms,

arms, after he had, with tender violence, extorted a promise from her to meet him alone in her garden, the next night, at the rise of the moon.

When he was gone, and she no longer saw him—when, by slow degrees, the voice of reason silenced the syren song of passion, then the mist that had before dimmed her sight was suddenly dispersed, and she saw the gulph of misery that love had plunged her into.

"I am lost!" exclaimed she, wringing her hands in a transport of grief—"My peace of mind, and every joy of my life, are irrecoverably lost; for I can never call him mine! His elevated rank has placed an insuperable bar betwixt us!"

Sleep fled from her eyes the greatest part of the night, till at last the pleasing illusions of love soothed her mind, and lulled her into a gentle slumber, and dreams that flattered her wishes; from which she awoke refreshed and comforted. The first dawn of day found her up and

sitting

sitting at the window; and as soon as it was daylight, she went into the garden. At the further end of it there was a neat little summer-house, erected on a hillock which overlooked the river that was close to it, and the adjacent fruitful and picturesque country. She went into the summer-house. The morning breeze was mild and balsamic, and mingled itself with her sighs; but every object she saw inspired her with hope. The vernal beauties of nature seemed to exclaim—"He is thine!—He is thine," appeared to her to be written on the azure of the unclouded sky, and the morning hymn of the feathered choristers of the air sounded—"He is thine!" into her ear. At that moment she by chance perceived the ring set with Edward's hair, that she had on her finger, and a tear started into her eye, which had the moment before sparkled with pleasure; and now, instead of an abyss of misery, saw a paradise spread out before it.

"Forgive

"Forgive me, Edward," said she, with uplifted hands, and a supplicating look—"forgive me for deceiving thee! But I was unacquainted with love, when I promised to be thine! Canst thou blame me for listening to the delightful voice of love, although it calls me away from thy heart?—O Charles!" continued she, with the enthusiasm that only a first love is capable of feeling—"where thou dwellest there is not room for another!" and she tossed the ring, which she had held in her hand whilst she was speaking, into the river, as she pronounced the last words.

As the sun rose higher, she felt a tightness across her breast: the image of Charles continually fluttered before her; but a thousand sad presages oppressed her heart. The solitariness of the place nourished her melancholy, which both pained and pleased her at the same time. She sometimes reflected on the object of her tenderest affections with secret sorrow, and at others with all the ecstasy of hope; and

and the nearer the hour of their meeting approached, the oftener did joy and sadness chace each other, and alternately predominate in her mind.

Nor was the Count's much easier than her's. Maria's beauty, her open, undesigning mind, agitated by the most violent love, and the good-humoured artless ingenuity of her manners, had made a deep impression on his heart, which was the more violent, as he had but seldom met with those amiable qualities before, and never united in the same person. He naturally possessed a quick sensibility, and a large fund of cheerfulness; but the latter was considerably diminished by the anxiety which the tumult of ungratified wishes, that continually raged in his bosom, occasioned; and those contending passions gave his whole being that appearance of mingled sadness and joy, that never fails making handsome people appear still handsomer.

In the midst of his brilliant career, and the

the life of dissipation he was entangled in, his bosom often heaved with a secret longing, which nothing he possessed was able to satisfy. Nature, beauty, and love, was the ideal of his dreams, which he had long sought for, but never found, till his accidental meeting with Maria, who answered, nay, exceeded his highest expectations and most ardent wishes.

He was of noble birth, and heir to an immense fortune: he was proud of the advantages he possessed, as well as those he had a right to expect; but he set more value on the adventitious gifts of fortune than on innate worth. His passions were violent, and whilst in their first fermentation, he thought no sacrifice too great to gratify them; but when they were silent, his heart was humane and noble, and he frequently, in the hours of calm reflection, repented, and was ashamed of his excesses. But, alas! his good intentions were seldom of long duration, for the

impetuo-

impetuosity of his temper generally led him soon again into fresh errors.

His father, who set a high value on the splendor of his house, had contracted him in marriage to Josephine d'Erker, the only child of the Count of that name, whose birth and fortune gave her a right to expect such an alliance. She was of noble extraction, her portion half a million, and her mind and person were without a blemish. Young Woodmar had never seen her, but he was strenuously attached to the opinion, that rank and fortune had a right to conclude marriages, and not love, which he thought could not endure fetters of any kind. A union with Josephine flattered his ambition, and seemed to him by no means to interfere with his attachment to Maria— Josephine would have his hand, Maria his heart! Publicly he would be the husband of the one, and privately, unenvied and unknown, the lover of the other!—

a delight-

a delightful plan, which no obstacle opposed, except Maria's virtue.

CHAP. IV.

THE gloom of evening approached, and Maria, with a throbbing heart, hailed the approach of darkness.

"Stay with me a little longer, my dear," said her father to her, when she wished him a good night, after supper.

"I am tired, and not very well," replied she, and blushed as she spoke, for it was the first wilful untruth she had ever uttered;—the first love and first falsehood are often inseparably united.

Her

Her knees trembled so violently, as she ran down the steps into the garden, that she could hardly stand: she took hold of the rails that were partly concealed by blooming jasmine, which shed an odoriferous scent, and gave way to the most pleasing presages, which were at times interrupted by slight but painful sensations of doubt and apprehension.

The moon had just stepped forth from behind the mountains, and enlightened, with a kind of magic charm, the dusky prospect. Ah, Maria! it was not the near approach of the moment in which you expected to meet your lover, that thrilled your soul with a secret dread, as you stood and trembled, whilst you gazed at Cynthia's silver beams; it was a kind of warning of your guardian angel, that bid you beware. Alas! the happiness of your future life was inseparably united with the blissful hour that you looked forward to with so much impatience, and fled away from you with it for ever. It

was

was then in your power to have conquered a passion that proved a source of never-ending woe to you; but the die was cast —your misery was written in the book of Fate, and an irresistible power, or at least one that you did not strive to oppose, urged you on to your destruction!

She opened the back door, and looked down the long road, which was deserted and dreary. She neither saw nor heard any thing, except her own shadow, and the plaintive notes of a solitary nightingale in the dark hedges of the garden. She stood still, and watched for some time, and at last perceived a white form approaching her;—it was Woodmar, who flew into the garden, threw off the large cloak he was wrapped up in, and rushed into the arms of the expecting maiden, who received him with silent rapture.

Maria's bliss was inexpressible. Enclosed in her lover's arms, and all her doubts and fears lulled to sleep by his protestations of love and vows of eternal constancy,

constancy, which opened that heaven to her view, which it is only in the power of love to bestow, it is not surprising that hours seemed to her as short as minutes. The solemn silence that surrounded the lovers, which was only now and then interrupted by Philomel's tender moans, the privacy of the place, Maria's beauty, which was heightened by the mild lustre of the moon, and her innocence, inflamed the Count's heart with wild wishes, and impure desires. He pressed her still closer to his bosom, and Maria, who did not entertain the least suspicion of her lover's honour, received his embraces, and returned them with the greatest tenderness. In that hour she irrevocably bestowed her heart on him for ever.

"Maria!" exclaimed the Count, with all the melting tenderness that his voice, which was naturally soft and persuasive, could assume—"Maria, dearest Maria! thou shalt be mine—nothing but death shall separate us!"

Maria,

Maria, surprised and overjoyed to find her most sanguine hopes and wishes, which had been silent till now, so far surpassed, was so overpowered by the violence of her feelings, that she burst into tears, and hiding her face on Woodmar's shoulder, stammered, in a low voice—"Charles, I m thine—thine for ever!"

Woodmar shuddered and coloured as he pronounced those words. "Can I be uch a villain," said he to himself, "to leceive her who so implicitly believes ny words?"

A just indignation sparkled in his eyes at that moment; but a glance at Maria, and a kiss of her's, soon brought back the unhallowed thoughts that had before occupied his mind; and he endeavoured to stifle them by recalling purer ideas.

"No, I will not abuse her confidence!" was the result of the conflict with himself. "I will not fill her lovely eyes with tears of bitter repentance! She must—she shall be mine! but she shall resign

herself

herself willingly to my arms by a contract, which, although no priest pronounces his blessing on it, will nevertheless be sacred to our hearts—not now, by the power that her unsuspecting innocence and incited passions give me over her.—Farewell, Maria!" said he, hastily tearing himself from her arms, and wrapping himself up in his cloak, that h[e] might remain firm in his determination— "Farewell! It is late—I must leav[e] you!"

"What! are you going already?" sighed Maria.

But he silenced her complaints with the pleasing assurance that he would write to her the next day. She eagerly grasped hold of a thought which afforded her so much pleasure, that the pangs of absence would be softened by his letters; and that when she did not see, she should at least have the satisfaction of hearing from him.

"Farewell, dear Charles—remember your

your promise!" said she, calling after him; but she spoke to the winds, for he was out of hearing long before she had recovered recollection enough to pronounce those words: she then locked the door, returned to the house, and hastened to bed, that she might dream of him.

The next morning, as soon as she was up, a letter was delivered to her from Woodmar. She contemplated the traces of the much-loved hand with rapture, and the large seal with a deep sigh. Her seal was a wreath of myrtle, which enclosed the initials of her name, and his adorned with a coronet, and all the fastidious emblems of high birth. It reminded her of the prodigious difference there was between them, which she would so gladly have forgot, and diminished the pleasure with which she opened the letter. But how is it possible to describe what she felt during the time she was reading, and when she had finished it? She sunk, pale and motionless, into the chair

that stood nearest her, the letter fell from her trembling hand upon the floor, and her eyes, that expressed all the agony of annihilated hope, were raised to heaven.

"Can love desire this?" said she, with warmth. "No, that is impossible!"

She wrung her hands, tears rolled in torrents down her cheeks, and her mind suffered all the torments that love and disappointment are capable of inflicting.—The contents of the letter were as follow:—

"I still feel the glow of your kisses on my burning cheeks, am still intoxicated with the nectar of your delightful embraces, and the love you have inspired me with, charming Maria, is increased to the full conviction that it is impossible for me to live without you! Maria!—Lovely, angelic Maria! you must—you shall be mine!

"I am

"I am condemned by Fate to spend my life in noise and splendor; nor is it in my power to free myself from the fetters with which I am bound: but the empty sound of stunning pleasures are not able to satisfy my heart, which nothing but your love, and the quiet possession of you, are capable of doing. Therefore, best—most adorable of women, sacrifice, without repining, to my ardent and sincere affection—the truest that ever warmed the heart of man—those prejudices which are called virtue, and determine to live for me alone, as I will (although the husband of another) merely exist for you, and to promote your happiness shall be the first, the chief study of my life. What is that virtue which we homage with timidity and awe?—because those who had the care of our education took advantage of our inexperience, and endeavoured to impress a respect for it on our youthful minds which it by no means deserves. Like a midnight

spectre, it steps between us and beckoning pleasure, and poisons the cup of gladness before it reaches our lips. No, Maria, true virtue consists in that kind compliance which diffuses joy and happiness around it—in constancy, in disinterested affection, which willingly resigns even that which is dearest to itself, to oblige the object of its love—and in the yielding which is caused by tenderness and not by duty. We marry, as the circumstances on which we depend ordain; and pride and interest are commonly the only considerations that are attended to in the marriages of the great: but we love to gratify our own hearts, and to find a secret indemnification for the unwilling sacrifice that inexorable Fate wrests from us. Retirement is the charming magic veil that enfolds and embellishes love, as the dawn of morn does the rising sun: Liberty animates its cheeks with celestial smiles, and crowns its brow with the garland of never-fading

fading roses, which constraint and duty would soon discontentedly tear asunder. I adore love, but I detest marriage, which is its grave; and never will she who bears my name, at the same time possess my heart, a heart that will eternally beat for you, and with a thousand times more fervor and constancy than if the nonsensical ceremony at the altar had united our hands.

"Let me speak honestly to you, girl of my heart. It is not in my power to marry you. Your situation (which your mind but, alas! not prejudice, exalts you above), and a number of other reasons, will not permit me to be your's in public, but in secret I will live for you alone. I therefore conjure you to conquer the objections that your too timid innocence may perhaps oppose to my wishes. I have an estate at a considerable distance from here; it is situated in a retired part of the country, far removed from the noise and bustle

of the great world, which, as it is entirely at my own disposal, shall be your's; and there, my Maria, where neither envy nor detraction can lessen our joys by their malicious and impertinent censures, will I, as often as I can tear myself away from the idle and troublesome pageantry of a court life, and the tasteless amusements of the town, find a paradise on your bosom, and a heaven in your arms; and the few short moments I spend with you will make me amends for months of constraint and *ennui*.

"Your father can, if he pleases, accompany you; but if he refuses to do so, crown my happiness—your Charles's happiness, by going away privately with him, who swears that he will repay your confidence with invariable tenderness! Speak to your father, Maria, and rely on the solemn promise I give you, to do all in my power to render you as happy as you deserve to be.

"I impa-

"I impatiently expect a line from you, which I hope will confirm the happiness of your

Eternally obliged,

and doting

CHARLES WOODMAR."

As soon as Maria had perused the letter, which at the same time wounded her heart and her pride, her determination was fixed. She was neither fond of writing, nor accustomed to it, which was the reason of her refusing to engage in a correspondence with Edward; but her abused confidence and wounded feelings conquered every difficulty, and she hastily snatched up a pen and wrote the following answer:—

"My Lord,

"The dishonourable proposals you were pleased to make, have speedily cured my love, by removing the good opinion I entertained of your Lordship. Yes, my Lord, I loved you tenderly, and am not ashamed of owning to you, for the last time, that I did so: but the principles of virtue that my worthy father early planted in my mind, are stronger than my love and your sophistry, and will enable me to bear your loss. I was mistress of a light and cheerful heart, as well as of an unspotted reputation, at the time I had the misfortune to become acquainted with you; and although you have robbed me of the first of those blessings, I will endeavour to preserve an approving conscience, and the good opinion of the world, which is by no means indifferent to me.

"Were

" Were you my equal in birth and fortune, I would on my knees have implored Heaven to have bestowed you on me; but the distance that Fate has placed between us, which you remind me of in such a cruel manner, does not permit me to entertain any other thought of you, except that of your not being born for me. I therefore desire that we may never see each other again!

" In the narrow circle of domestic life to which I am confined, I shall find it difficult to expunge you, who so entirely filled it, from my mind; but the consciousness of acting right will be my support and comfort, and likewise strengthen me in the resolution I have taken, which no arguments, in your power to use, will ever be able to weaken.

" I wish you all imaginable happiness, although you have perhaps destroyed my peace of mind for ever. I will pray for you, that it may please God to purify your heart, remove the false notions that you

at present entertain of virtue, and render you as happy as it is possible to be.—Me you will never see again.

"MARIA MILLER."

CHAP. V.

MARIA carried this letter to her father as soon as she had written it, and informed him of every thing that had happened. She implored his forgiveness with tears of unfeigned sorrow, which she received, as well as the assurance of his entire approbation of her answer to the Count's letter.

Never did a father love a child better than old Miller loved Maria: he did all in

in his power to dry her tears, and his only fear was that his efforts to do so would prove ineffectual: But he was mistaken; for as soon as the first storm of grief, which the erroneous opinion she had formed of her lover's character, and her own frustrated hopes, occasioned, was over, it changed into a silent sadness. She endeavoured to chace away the melancholy that had taken possession of her mind, by a number of occupations; but her efforts were not as successful as she wished them to be, for it followed her wherever she went, like her shadow. Her eyes were dry, and only when she left her chamber, a little redness was visible in them, which betrayed that they had been moistened in private. In her, till lately, cheerful looks appeared that meek and affecting affability combating against tears, which is the peculiar characteristic of a noble and unfortunate mind, which supports its sorrow in silence, and, through

 delicacy,

delicacy, wishes to conceal it from the knowledge of the world.

About this time, old Miller received Edward's first letter, which breathed nothing but impatience to return, constancy, and love. Maria read it, and the gloom that had before clouded her countenance increased as she returned it to her father, who asked her what she thought of it.

"Think," replied she, "that I will not deceive him. Edward deserves a free and undivided heart, a heart that is not rent with sorrow, nor filled with love for another."

"How, my child," said Miller, with a look of astonishment—"how is it possible that you can still love the man who wanted to debase you so low?"

"I turn, with abhorrence and contempt, from his black proposal," answered Maria; "but himself—ah, my father!—I still love him, with all the ardour I am capable of feeling. The world has

corrupted his manners, but it is only a transient delirium, a dream that his better judgment disapproves, and from which he will certainly awake. Perhaps it may be in the power of some amiable maiden of his own rank, to lead him gently back into the paths of rectitude that he has swerved from; and then, if he is happy—perfectly happy," continued she, with streaming eyes—"O then I will willingly forgive him, for wounding my heart so deeply as he has done!"

"And will you then, merely on account of a whim, destroy Edward's hopes and mine, at the same time?" said her father.

"Edward would be miserable, was I to marry him," replied Maria.—"O therefore, best of parents, permit me to remain single, that I may pine away my sad existence without the additional sorrow of knowing that I have involved another in my unhappiness. My spring of life will fleet away calm and retired, in endeavouring to cheer your age, and fulfilling those duties

duties which God and my conscience exact; but indeed I cannot marry. Should I, when I am unfortunate enough to be deprived of you, be in need of a male friend, I will apply to Edward, whose friendship I know I can safely depend on at all times."

She then clasped her arms round her father's neck, and her tears rolled down his furrowed cheeks, whilst she tenderly embraced him, and implored his permission to remain single, with so much earnestness, that it was impossible for the old man to withstand her entreaties; and he gave her a solemn promise that he would never force her to marry.

Woodmar was not a little surprised at the spirited and decisive answer that he received from Maria. He had, from the beginning of their acquaintance, entertained a high opinion of her delicacy and virtue; but the tenderness of her heart, and the violent passion he had inspired her with, made him suppose she would prove

prove an easy conquest; and a look, a word, or a kiss, would, he thought, be sufficient to make her resolutions waver. But, greatly as he found himself mistaken in the opinion he had formed of her, he determined to persevere in his attempts, and did not entertain a doubt of their proving successful in time. He called at her house every day, but the old maid had received orders from her master and his daughter, always to deny them to him. He wrote to her, with all the warm and persuasive eloquence that can be used to defend and varnish over vice; but Maria returned him all his letters unopened.

He then attempted to bribe one of her neighbours, and spared neither money nor flattery to win her over to his purpose, and, by her means, gain a sight, and effect a reconciliation with Maria. But that offended and cautious girl, conscious of her weakness, eluded every snare that was laid for her virtue, and

remained

remained invisible to the eye of her seducer.

The vexation that the Count felt whenever a new attempt proved ineffectual, by degrees cooled the ardent desire he felt to see Maria. "She is a foolish romantic girl, that wishes to be married but not loved," he would peevishly say to himself—"a heroine of virtue, like Pamela: *et cetera,* such as one finds in novels, and no where else." But Maria's picture, which remembrance frequently recalled to his mind, adorned with all the charms of youth, beauty, and innocence, opposed itself to his anger, and conquered it speedier and oftener than he wished. He felt a void in his bosom that nothing could fill, and an alteration in his temper that embittered every joy. In vain did George do all in his power to amuse his master, by endeavouring to engage him in new amours, or, when those failed of the wished-for success, by proposing violent methods, and offering his service to get

Maria

Maria into his power by stratagem, and then carrying her off by force. But the voice of honour suppressed the clamour of his glowing wishes, and he replied, in a determinate manner—" No! If her imaginary virtue affords her the highest bliss she is capable of tasting, why should I rob her of it?—what right have I to do so?—Ah, Maria!" continued he, in the mournful accents of unrequited love, " your affection would have bestowed a heaven of happiness on me, but your caprices are dearer to you than my felicity; not one of them will you relinquish on my account: keep them then, and be happy! I will strive to forget you."

He sighed as he spoke, and with every fresh sigh his calmed imagination infused a greater share of tranquillity and resignation into his mind.

" Go and pay your respects to your bride and her family—her education is finished, and she is willing to accept your

hand, as soon as the necessary preparations are made; the wedding must be in two months at furthest,"—was part of the contents of a letter that he received from his father, just after he had formed the aforementioned resolution.

This unexpected intelligence made the young Count's heart flutter; but the sensations he felt were of so peculiar a nature, that he could not, to a certainty, determine if they were caused by pain or pleasure. He was not a friend to matrimony, but he nevertheless did not, by any means, wish to avoid the band that was to unite him with Josephine, although he foresaw that it would abridge him of some part of the golden joys of his liberty. A long chain of thoughts, that had hitherto been foreign to his mind, were suggested by his approaching marriage.

"Josephine is reported to be handsome and agreeable," said he to himself, "and she may perhaps amuse me, although it will

will never be in her power to fetter my heart."

His melancholy was dispersed by the number of new prospects that futurity offered to his view, which, if they had no other charm, had at least that of novelty to recommend them. He made another attempt to speak to Maria, which proved as fruitless as his former ones had been; for her door remained close to him, and the lamentations his letters contained did not find the way to her heart.

His pride was hurt at what he termed Maria's obstinacy, and he set out on his journey with the firm determination to bury every thought of her in eternal oblivion; but as his post-chaise flew through the street she lived in, and passed her house, and the white garden wall, over which the rustling branches of the dark lime-trees hung, which had kindly afforded him and (as he then thought) his Maria a shelter, the happy night he spent with her there, his heart was so oppressed,

that

that it felt as if it would burst, and he could not help breaking out into loud complaints of her too rigid virtue.—"O!" exclaimed he, stamping his foot against the bottom of the carriage, "what a fool was I to let those hours, which would have ensured Maria to me for ever, pass away in the manner I did, without making a better use of them! If I had not been too conscientious at that time, she would now have been mine, and my tenderness would have calmed her fears, and removed her doubts, a thousand times better than all the arguments I afterwards employed to lull her innocence asleep, and prevail on her to consent to be mine."

He endeavoured to forget and despise her; but it was impossible for him to do either, and his desire to be with her increased with the distance that separated them: he recollected how sweet her kisses were, the inimitable charm that accompanied all she said or did, and her ardent love, blended with the most unaffected

affected modesty, with a deep sigh, and the most poignant regret that he never durst hope to call her his, who alone had it in her power to strew his path of life with roses.

Yet, angry as he was with Maria for disappointing his hopes, he could not help secretly respecting the firmness of her principles. "What sort of virtue can that be," would he say to himself, "that is powerful enough to conquer a violent passion? I have no idea of it; but yet I fancy it must make those who are in possession of it happy, as, according to the received opinion, it affords hopes of a future and better life. I wish I was able to deceive myself, and believe in it.—Nay," continued he, after a pause, "I declare I would resign half the pleasures that the freedom of my opinion permits me to enjoy, without thinking I do wrong, if I could, by doing so, purchase that pious chimera which is so gratifying to those who possess it."

During

During the time that Woodmar, with a mind that was entirely engrossed by Maria, sorrowfully approached his bride, he was expected by her with an aching heart. Josephine was determined to give her hand to the man her parents had chosen for her, although she neither loved, nor even knew him; and for whom she, on account of the warm interest that another had inspired her with, felt a something which nearly resembled aversion: And Josephine, who had with difficulty worked herself up to the resolution of subduing her darling wish, and convinced herself of the necessity there was of doing so, still shed many tears in private, and was often obliged to summon up all her pride to her assistance, to conquer the terror that the thought of his approach threw her into.

Alas! much as Josephine was an object of envy, she was far from being happy; for, under a cold and haughty exterior, she concealed a warm and feeling heart, that required other qualifications

in

in a bridegroom than money and noble birth. Her temper was of the serious kind, which rather inclined to the saturnine; acute sensibility dwelt in her bosom; and although the constraint of her rank had enveloped her in a mantle of coldness, as the sweetly-blooming violet is sometimes concealed by a covering of snow, yet they both rewarded those who took the trouble to seek them. Her parents, persons of too little consequence to deserve particular mention, had left the capital when Josephine was about fourteen years of age, on account of some slight they had received from the Court, which did not think it necessary to comply with all the ridiculous pretensions they made to be treated with particular distinction.

Josephine, who, although she was their only daughter, and, what was of more consequence in the opinion of the world, sole heiress to their immense riches, had not engaged much of their attention during their brilliant career; much, therefore,

fore, was wanting to give her education that fine polish which a finished education requires; and the sullen discontent that accompanied her parents into the country, made it impossible for them to undertake the task themselves: but had they even been willing to do so, the want of proper masters would have been an insurmountable obstacle; they therefore determined to send her to a boarding-school, that a certain Mrs. Wilmot had lately opened, and which was mentioned in terms of the highest commendation.

Mrs. Wilmot was a widow gentlewoman, who possessed much knowledge and a very small fortune. Before her marriage she had been governess in a family of the first distinction, where she had herself learned every thing that is necessary for a person who devotes herself to the honourable but difficult task of superintending the education of young ladies to know.

One son was the only fruit of a marriage

riage which had been uncommonly happy, who, by the good propensities he discovered at a very early age, softened the pain that the loss of a much-loved husband occasioned, and changed it into a silent melancholy, which was more pleasing to her than all the joys that a heart which has never felt the disappointment and anguish that darkened prospects, frustrated hopes, and lost comforts occasion, is capable of tasting. When she became widow, she received very advantageous proposals from some of the first families, to superintend the education of their daughters; but she had acquired a taste for independence, which she could not prevail on herself to renounce; she, therefore, collected the whole of her little fortune, which she laid out in fitting up a genteel house for a boarding-school, which undertaking was attended with uncommon success.

The gentleness of her manners inspired confidence, the indulgence she shewed

to her pupils was calculated to gain the affections of their youthful minds, and the well-meant severity with which she censured and punished their faults, ensured her the love and esteem of both parents and children. Josephine was sincerely attached to the respectable matron, who treated her with more kindness, and returned her sensibility with more warmth than she had ever met with before. She felt as if she was suddenly removed into a new and better life, a life which, in the monotony of her former existence, had flitted in her fancy like a beautiful ideal, without her entertaining the least notion of its ever being realized.

The method that Mrs. Wilmot employed to gain the affection of the children that were entrusted to her care, was very simple; she reposed a confidence in them, and received theirs in return; when she censured, it was only the faults, but never the person who committed them; and she carefully avoided saying or doing any thing

thing which could wound their self-love, which, as she often asserted, when properly guided, proves a great assistance in giving a right and elevated turn to the heart. Her behaviour to the children was so maternal and delicate, that it filled their youthful minds with love and awe for the person who they all regarded as the tenderest of parents.

"Be sincere and candid," would Mrs. Wilmot often say to her scholars, and they were so, because she herself practised the virtues that she inculcated. She taught the young ladies how to employ their time in a useful manner, and endeavoured to inspire them with an abhorrence for idleness; for "Industry," would she say, "is one of the fairest flowers in the wreath of female virtues."

She particularly recommended secresy, and proved to them how often the domestic happiness of whole families had been destroyed, long friendships interrupted, and the truest love broken, by a

want of it. Tears would at such times tremble in Josephine's large blue eyes; and she vowed to Mrs. Wilmot and herself that she would conscientiously conceal every secret which she might in future be trusted with, in her own bosom, and that it should repose there as safely as in the grave.

"Correct your own faults with severity, but overlook, and patiently endure those that you perceive in others," was another of Mrs. Wilmot's maxims; but it was one that Josephine could not give her assent to, and she always shook her head with a doubtful look when she heard it. She was very willing to apply the first part of it to herself, and really did so; but to wink at the failings of others was what she could not prevail on herself to do, and she never tolerated the faults, and but seldom pitied the weakness of her acquaintance. She felt her own worth, and the power of acting right, that she possessed too forcibly, to make all the allowances

allowances her governess required; for she thought it was in every one's power, if they would exert themselves, to act as she did.

Mrs. Wilmot could neither disapprove nor eradicate the pride that was founded on the purity of her young friend's heart; she therefore only strove to moderate it, and she succeeded in doing so.

"This pride," would she say to herself, "if she retains it uncorrupted, will never let her sink—it will enable her to retain the stability and purity of her mind unsullied, on the slippery surface of a court life, and avoid those rocks on which the great generally founder."

Josephine was the eldest of her pupils, and as she was excluded from the general lessons that the younger children received, she spent the greatest part of her time in the company of her dear foster-mother, as she loved to call her governess.

Augustus Wilmot used likewise, as often as his duty permitted (he was an officer), to share those tranquil hours with them which his mother's mildness and improving conversation, and Josephine's gaiety, meliorated by a thoughtfulness rather uncommon at her age, rendered hours of bliss to him.

Augustus was an amiable young man in the first bloom of youth; his person was agreeable, without being what is generally termed handsome, for dignity and innate worth were strongly stamped on his whole being. He united warm feelings and strict morality with firmness of mind; and his filial affection, which was evinced by the whole tenor of his behaviour, gave a softness to his manners which rendered his society extremely pleasing. He had never felt the power of love, but had often, in the retirement he usually lived in, given a loose to the reins of fancy, and amongst the pleasing ideas of futurity which that suggested,

suggested, was always interwoven those of reciprocal love and a happy marriage. But he had neither sought nor found an object that he thought capable of filling up the void he felt in his mind: fine faces had hitherto had the same effect on him as fine flowers—they pleased his eye, but none of them had ever touched his heart.

Amongst the many agreeable accomplishments that young Wilmot possessed, were those of drawing and painting, both of which he excelled in. His mother had once, half in jest, appointed him drawing-master to her pupils; and as both parties took pains, and were mutually satisfied with each other, he was permitted to retain an office which he discharged so well.

Josephine, who was very quick of apprehension, soon acquired a taste for drawing, and made a great proficiency in it, on which account Augustus took more pains with her than the rest, as the facility with which she learnt assisted his endea-

vours to be useful to her, and rendered them a light and pleasant task.

About two years passed away in this manner with very little variation. Josephine was grown an exceeding fine girl, but Augustus, who had seen her beauties disclose themselves by degrees, did not remark them, as they were familiar to him. The opportunity he had of seeing and conversing with her daily, and his thorough knowledge of the many good qualities she possessed, had inspired him with the highest regard for her; but his affection was entirely devoid of passion, and of the unruffled and peaceful kind that a brother feels for a deserving sister. Josephine likewise highly esteemed her friend, and the pure and steady flame that glowed in her bosom, filled her heart with the most perfect confidence in, and highest esteem for, him. She was never happier than when she was in his company, and the hour that was fixed for her drawing lesson was always expected by her with

restless

restless and impatient joy. Josephine's heart was too innocent to conceal any thing that passed in it; and the pleasure that Augustus's company afforded her, sparkled in her eyes in so expressive a manner, that it was impossible for him not to remark it. He, who justly valued her esteem, approached her with warmer sentiments of, as he thought, gratitude, the plainer he perceived that she, in the innocence and charming simplicity of her mind, attached herself more and more to him.

Matters were in this state when Augustus one day expressed a wish to make a trial of his skill in portrait painting, which he had not yet attempted, and requested the favour of Josephine to allow him to paint her, which she willingly consented to. The necessary preparations were soon made, and the young Countess sat, in the easy becoming posture that was natural to her, opposite to the young painter.

CHAP. VI.

THERE is no situation more dangerous for two young and inexperienced hearts, who have not yet sported with the most sacred sensations the human mind is capable of feeling, and whose innocence has, till now, stifled the secret voice of nature in their bosoms, or at least reduced it to gentle sighs, than to sit, eye riveted on eye, look on look, and mind on mind, over against each other.

Josephine, who had frequently been whole hours alone with Augustus, without feeling the least embarrassment, without her cheeks being tinged with a deeper shade

shade of vermillion, or experiencing the least palpitation of the heart, now, the moment that she found herself under the necessity of keeping her eyes stedfastly fixed on her friend, was seized with a sweet confusion, which flushed her face with an unusual glow, and made her eyes sparkle with more than common brightness, and at length even caused tears to start into them. She had never before sat so entirely unemployed in his company, nor had he ever appeared to her in the light he did in then; his eyes, at other times so mild and calm, were at present animated with a fire that penetrated Josephine's very soul; and the result of their continually gazing at each other in the manner they did, was the observation they both made in the same moment, that their *vis-à-vis* was extremely handsome.

Josephine rose from her seat, and Augustus presented the picture to her: it was only a hasty sketch, but adorned with all the charms of the original. Josephine,

surprised at the sight of her own beauty, which she was so little acquainted with, returned the portrait with a blush, downcast look, and these words—"You have greatly flattered me, Captain Wilmot—I am not near so handsome as this picture."

"I have not been fortunate enough to take a striking likeness," replied he; "but how was it possible to copy exactly those beautiful expressive eyes, this majestic forehead, these charming friendly lips, and blooming cheeks, that are dimpled by the Graces, and overspread with the rosy tinge of morn? No pencil will ever be able to do justice to your charms, and this I felt too forcibly, whilst I was tracing your features, to expect to be more fortunate than I have been."

"Do you wish to make me vain, or, what seems much more probable, are you jesting?" said Josephine.

"Neither one nor the other," replied Wilmot, with a profound sigh. "I will be silent."

He

He left the room with a respectful bow; the young Countess remained in it, and, deeply involved in thought, followed him with her eyes. This single hour had enlightened the darkness that had before reigned in her mind, and the inclination she felt for Augustus was greatly increased; besides, it was of a much warmer and tenderer kind than she had ever experienced before. Nor was it now entirely confined to the goodness of his heart, or his mental perfections, and the excellency of his character; for the comeliness of his person in the full bloom of youth and health, likewise claimed some share of it. She recalled his image to her mind; his large expressive eyes, in which the fire of newly-kindled love blazed, his agreeable features, strongly animated by the warmth of his feelings, the elegance of his form, the dignity in his gait, and the penetrating sound of his voice. It seemed to her as if an invisible hand had suddenly withdrawn the curtain which had hitherto en-

viously

viously concealed all those attractions, and prevented her having discovered them before. She spread out her arms, and exclaimed—"Augustus! Augustus!" in a trembling and pathetic voice, and clasped the empty air to her bosom, as if it had been the beloved youth. She then went into her own room, threw herself upon the sofa, and shed a shower of tears. We sometimes feel a sadness which we, instead of striving to dispel, endeavour to nourish, and that is the never-failing attendant of a first love.

In those golden halcyon days in which the power of loving first awakes in our mind, and we have found the object that has taught us the susceptibility of our heart, the hurricane of nameless sensations that at such time rages within us, the uncertainty we are in if our love is returned or not, and the hope and fear which alternately agitates our bosom, although the former generally predominates, always keeps a tear in readiness for us. But, even

even if it was in our power, we would not exchange the soft and pleasing dejection that at such times oppresses our mind, which was hitherto only the abode of innocence, and is now jointly inhabited by that and love, for all the joys that fate may hereafter have in reserve for us.

Augustus likewise sought solitude, the friend and confidant of love-sick minds, with Josephine's picture in his hand, on which his eyes rested with looks of enthusiastic fondness.

"Ah! she alone is capable of filling up the immeasureable vacuity there is in my heart," said he, as he pressed the picture, that he had wetted with his tears, to his bosom. "Ah! if she returned my love, how inexpressibly happy I should then be!"

He nourished this idea with all the ardour of love, and pleasing fallacious hope encouraged him to believe what he wished. He foresaw the many obstacles that would oppose his calling her his; and they were

of a nature that almost rendered his ever doing so an impossibility; but he endeavoured to continue a deception that was so highly pleasing to him; and his heated imagination led him into the enchanted regions of an imaginary futurity, when Josephine would listen to his vows of love with condescending blushes, and reward his passion with a declaration of his being equally dear to her. She would be his; and with that thought a heaven of happiness opened itself to his ravished sight. Poor Augustus!

When they met in the parlour the next day, Wilmot perceived a sweet confusion in Josephine's looks and manners. She cast her eyes down when they happened to meet his, and contemplated his face as often as she fancied she could do so unobserved, with secret pleasure, in which however some slight traces of pain were visible. They were at last left alone, and Josephine sat down to her drawing with a palpitating heart. She wished, yet dreaded,

dreaded, to hear a declaration of love, which she had prepared herself to answer; but Wilmot was silent.

"I work at this landscape," said she, at last, in a hesitating voice—"with peculiar pleasure; the back ground is so solemn, the bluish mountains, which loose themselves in the deep and lonely valley, the foaming stream which gushes from the top of the rock, and rushes impetuously through the vale, and here, on this side, the peaceful cot that is covered with ivy, that so calmly looks down the gentle declivity on which it stands. There is a pleasing contrast between the elevated beauties of nature, and the serene comforts of domestic life in this view—don't you think so, Captain Wilmot?"

"O certainly!" replied he, fixing his eye on the humble cottage, that was almost concealed by the trees which surrounded it. "These majestic mountains, and this foaming stream, afford a pleasing aspect; but how much more delightful must it be," continued

continued he, in a trembling voice, "to dwell in that lonely hut that just peeps out so invitingly betwixt the trees! I cannot help thinking that some ill-fated love, which the world condemned, but God approved, sought and found a place of refuge there, which kindly sheltered it from the storms of fate."

"Which the world condemned, but God approved!" was repeated by Josephine, but in so low a voice that her words were hardly audible.

"Yes, Madam," replied Wilmot, who stood lost in a train of uneasy reflections. "Suppose a couple of hearts, encouraged by nature, and their perfect coincidence in every respect, were warmly and sincerely attached to each other, and policy stepped between, and the world censured their love. Oh! how wisely they would act in such a case, and how enviable they would be, if they had courage enough to sacrifice every consideration that opposed their love, for the sake of each other! To

renounce

renounce a world that is full of prejudices, and in a solitude like this, by reciprocal love and constancy, to be every thing to each other. Don't you think that the Almighty would pronounce his blessing on such a love, although man might condemn it? Don't you think," continued he, in a more animated manner, "that such a love would find a rich reward in itself for all that it relinquished?"

"It is not in my power to answer you," replied Josephine; "but my opinion is, that a love such as you describe, however delightful it may be, can only be ideal to those who have higher duties to fulfil."

"Higher duties!" exclaimed Augustus, with a look of astonishment.

"Yes," answered Josephine, "I am convinced that it is right, in many cases, to laugh at the opinion of the world, if it is placed in competition with our happiness; and I am fully persuaded that the voice we ought to pay the most attention to is that of reason and our own heart,

and

and not that of the public. But I am equally certain that we ought to do all in our power to conquer a passion that we find beginning to take too deep root in our mind, without there being the least probability of our ever daring to own and glory in it. Suppose, for example, I love—love a man who the world would term my inferior, but possessed of every good quality, except the accidental advantages of birth and fortune, which a heart that truly loves would gladly overlook—suppose I was violently in love with him, and was convinced that he returned my passion with equal warmth, and at the same time fully persuaded that I could never be happy with another, in that case, how do you suppose I should act?"

"You would render your lover happy, and be happy yourself," replied Augustus in the most violent perturbation, for it seemed to him as if the happiness or misery of his future life depended entirely on his answer.

"No,

" No, Wilmot!" said Josephine, in a low voice, and streaming eyes, " no, if my parents blessing did not sanctify the band my heart had formed, not even the most violent love would prevent my breaking it. Obedience to parents is one of the most sacred duties that nature has ordained, and woe be to those who trample it under foot! No, I will never be undutiful!—and even the thought of having sacrificed my will to my parents, will (should that hard destiny be mine) afford me some consolation in the moments of bitterest anguish; and the certainty of having performed my duty will alleviate my sufferings.

" Amiable, noble-minded girl!" said Augustus, " I admire, although it is not in my power to imitate you."

He pronounced these words in feeble accents, for despair had broken his clear and manly voice; his lips quivered, tears rushed into his eyes, which seemed to say—

say—" O, why so much duty, and so little love?"

Josephine had really disclosed her true sentiments in what she said: she was quite certain that the warm interest she took in every thing that concerned him, and the esteem that a long acquaintance with the various good qualities he possessed in an eminent degree, had inspired her with an inclination for him that she had long mistaken for friendship, but which she now discovered to be love. She for some hours amused herself with the most delightful hope. Ah! how blissful were those hours! and she enjoyed, with all the fervour of a youthful heart, in which every tender sentiment is still in blossom, the enthusiasm that forced her away with it. But this state of mental intoxication, if I may be allowed the expression, was but of short duration; and then the real world, from which her heated imagination had taken flight, and hurried her into an imaginary

imaginary one, appeared to her in the most dismal colours.

"I love—yes, I love him!" exclaimed she; "but I will strive to forget him, for he never can be mine!"

But she found the task that she had imposed on herself very, very difficult indeed. She saw him again, and she felt her intention begin to waver; a voice within her seemed to say—"He is the only man with whom I can be happy:" and whilst she, in short and happy intervals, forgot every obstacle that opposed her love, she wished him to make a declaration of his, which she determined to answer with all the warmth of reciprocal passion. But when Augustus spoke of a love that Heaven would approve, but men condemn, the recollection of her elevated rank stepped, like a frightful phantom, between the palpitating hearts that wished to approach each other, and she summoned up all the resolution, all the fortitude she was mistress of, to deprive him

him of every hope which she well knew would be vain.

Josephine rose from her seat with the intention of leaving the room, for she perceived that remaining in it much longer would prove dangerous to her design, as the assumed indifference with which she had spoken began to give way to warmer sensations. Augustus, overwhelmed with sorrow, looked at her with inexpressible anguish, and a tear glistened in Josephine's eye, in spite of her endeavours to suppress it, and look cheerful—it reflected Augustus's fate! He fell upon his knees in an agony that it is impossible to describe, a declaration of love escaped his trembling lips, and Josephine, too weak to subdue the impetuous passions that raged in her heart, gave him, in a long embrace, the assurance of her's.

Even many years after, Augustus's fancy dwelt with pleasure on the remembrance of that hour, although the pangs of hopeless love mingled themselves with the first kiss,

kiss, which lessened the rapture that the certainty of being loved occasioned, and poured some drops of wormwood into the cup of ecstatic joy.

"Ah, Wilmot!" exclaimed Josephine, "why did you oblige me to break the silence that I imposed on myself? I love you, but I must, and am resolved to conquer my inclination, let the consequences be what they will."

"Conquer your inclination!" said Wilmot, with a look of astonishment. "Can this be love, Josephine? I would, for your sake, renounce the whole world, if you desired it; and the sacred flame that glows in my bosom, which you have kindled, would richly recompence me, even if I retained nothing else; and you can calmly talk of resigning me, merely because capricious Fortune forgot to bestow a coronet on me!"

"Is not my happiness comprised in your's?" replied Josephine; "nor can you feel the anguish that the thought of

an eternal separation occasions, more acutely than I do; but I know my parents, and am convinced that their entertaining the most trifling suspicion of our love would be sufficient to ruin us both. Alas, Wilmot, my hand is promised to another; and I can do nothing but obey, and—weep for you."

She concealed her face in his bosom, as she pronounced those words, and gave a loose to her tears, which flowed abundantly.

"You say you can do nothing but obey, and weep!" returned Augustus—"Oh yes, Josephine, you could do more, if you really loved me! Here," continued he, taking up the landscape, and pointing to the lonely cot, "here is an asylum for true love! My life, and every thing I possess, shall be devoted to you, and my only study shall be how I may be able to make you amends for the comforts you relinquish on my account."

"Have you forgct," returned Josephine, with

with a melancholy smile and a heavy sigh, "that I have duties to fulfil, which, powerful as inclination is, it must yield to? How gladly would I, if I durst follow the inclination of my heart, renounce all the advantages that birth and fortune have bestowed on me, to prove to you that I do not seek for happiness either in riches or splendor. Count Woodmar is my destined husband. I never saw him, nor can I ever love him. Alas! the thought of marrying him is more painful than that of death to me, and I believe will kill me; but I am, nevertheless, resolved to give him my hand."

"Oh no! it will not kill you!" replied Augustus, with a satirical smile: "you will live to be admired and envied, and to witness the misery of the man who doats on you to excess; which will be a triumph to your vanity, without costing your eye a tear."

He walked, in an offended and haughty manner, towards the door, as he pronounced

nounced those words. Josephine stretched out her hand towards him, but her feelings were so deeply wounded by his anger, that she was not able to articulate a word. Had he turned his head round, the sight of his speechless anguish would certainly have effected a reconciliation between them; but he went without looking at her, and Josephine left the parlour, and hastened to her own apartment, to conceal her tears.

CHAP. VII.

A DULL week passed slowly away without Wilmot's visiting his mother. Josephine was low-spirited, which did not escape Mrs. Wilmot's notice; but she believed that her approaching union with a man, who she knew nothing of, except his name, was the reason of her pensiveness. Besides, the time that was fixed for their separation drew near; and as the idea of being deprived of Josephine's company was extremely painful to Mrs. Wilmot, she was gratified by the thought of her young friend's leaving her with reluctance.

Augustus's absence had not effaced the impression that he had made on Josephine. Her mind reviewed the past, and called back to her remembrance every happy hour she had spent in his company: the sweetness of his temper, the mild seriousness of his manners, the knowledge, and various agreeable accomplishments he was master of, and the modesty with which he concealed them from public observation. "Alas!" would she frequently say to herself, "why am I not a poor curate's daughter? how happily would my days then glide away, in the calm comforts of domestic enjoyments, and in the arms of the man I love! Or why did my brothers die? If they had lived, I should not then be the only child—my parents only hope; and if I left them to follow the dictates of my doating heart, they would not be quite deserted, for dutiful sons would comfort them for the loss of a daughter, who would feel herself infinitely happier in the poverty she had chosen,

chosen, than the possession of their riches can ever make her."

She painted to herself, with all the charms that a lively imagination could create, a delightful futurity with Augustus; she, in idea, built an humble thatched cottage for him and herself, in a lonely and romantic spot, and surrounded by a garden which produced their plain and frugal nourishment. An unclouded heaven cheered this abode of Peace and Love with continual sunshine, Nature kindly spread its loveliest verdant carpet round it, and Happiness and calm Content was the lot of its cheerful and unenvied inhabitants.

Imaginary pleasures are sometimes greater than those that are found in reality, when things seldom are such as we wish, and what they might be: a rose never grows without thorns, and the mildest evening breeze is always intermingled with sighs. There was a time in which I believed that the remembrance of the past could offer a

lenifying balsam to the heart that is wounded by the present; but it is not so—for the recollection of former enjoyments, when we recal them to our minds, is always accompanied with the soul-harrowing thought of what we have long lost, and long loved. Every tear that we shed at that time moistens our eye anew, and every sigh again heaves our bosom. Recollection can at most only be a palliative which rubs off the sharpest points of our grief, but is not able to deprive it of the slowly consuming bitterness that, like a gnawing vulture, preys upon, and devours the heart. But in those happy moments in which fancy transports us into an imaginary world, we entirely forget the sorrows and disappointments that never fail falling to the lot of mortals in this sublunary one; and every wish that was silent whilst our thoughts were occupied with business or pleasure, becomes clamorous, because our agitated mind lends an indulgent ear to them, and fancies itself strong

strong enough to perform every thing it deserves, although it is only so in imagination.

Josephine turned from the smiling picture her fancy had delineated, and to which love and enthusiasm had reached her the colours, to the dismal prospect that futurity presented to her view: she saw herself surrounded with all the pomp, and often glittering misery, of high life, with a dismal unrequited heart, united to a man whose choice was directed by interested motives, and who would have married her, with her birth and fortune, had she had as many vices and deformities as she possessed virtues and beauties. She felt a violent aversion for the man who she regarded as the disturber of her peaceful existence at Mrs. Wilmot's, and determined to treat him as contemptuously as possible.

"But," said she to herself, after some consideration, "perhaps he is as little master of his actions as I am of mine. Who

Who knows if his marriage with me does not tear asunder some tender band that his heart has formed—if he does not dread the time as much as I do, in which he will be obliged to sacrifice his freedom, perhaps his love, to me?"

This supposition changed her dislike into pity.

"No," said the voice of innate goodness that inhabited her heart, "no, I will lighten his burden—a burden that we must mutually bear, as much as lies in my power. He shall never perceive my disapprobation, nor that another possesses my heart. I will esteem him, if he is good, overlook his faults, if he has any, and endeavour to perform my duty as well as I am able."

That gentle composure which accompanies and rewards every good purpose, soothed Josephine's troubled mind, and encouraged her to persevere in her intention. She however continued to think of Augustus with all the tendernesss he had inspired.

inspired her with, and which he so well merited.

"I find he is determined not to see me again," said she, at the expiration of the week that passed without his coming: "he is determined to banish the image of the unfortunate creature, who is obliged to renounce him, from his mind by absence."

She felt herself honoured by his conduct, and the delicacy with which he treated her weakness, rendered him still dearer to her. She had long before forgiven the anger in which he parted from her, and believed, as she had reason to do, that as soon as he impartially reflected on her conduct, not a trace of it would remain.

But Mrs. Wilmot, who could no ways account for her son's absenting himself from her house, was extremely uneasy at it; and as his lodging was at no great distance, she determined to go and enquire the reason of it herself.

She found him sitting very composedly at his table, drawing, and the only alteration she perceived in him was, that he was rather paler than usual. He rose from his seat as soon as he saw his mother, kissed her hand, and expressed the joy that the sight of her in his room gave him.

"Then I find, Augustus," said Mrs. Wilmot, with a look of astonishment, "that it was neither illness nor business that prevented your coming to me: and whilst I impatiently longed to see you, and harboured a thousand fears on your account, I find you sitting with the greatest ease and unconcern at your drawing, although you must be convinced how much pleasure your company always gives me."

Mrs. Wilmot's gentle reproaches tinged her son's cheeks with a faint colour, his eyes glistened, he rushed into her maternal arms, and burst into tears, which flowed the more abundantly on account of their being long suppressed.

"What is the matter with you, Augustus?"

tus?" exclaimed the terrified mother. "What distresses you in this manner? Speak—conceal nothing from me! I never saw you so violently agitated before!"

"Oh, my mother! my dear mother!" replied he, in a voice that tears rendered almost unintelligible, "I am unhappy—very unhappy indeed!"

"You terrify me, Wilmot! What have you done? Alas! it must be something very bad indeed, that you was afraid to inform me of it! And how was it possible to expect any thing of that kind from you?"

Augustus endeavoured to compose himself and dry his tears.

"No, best of mothers," replied he, after a long pause, "do not alarm yourself. I am unfortunate, but not undeserving of your love. My peace of mind enjoined the painful task of absenting myself from your house, where I used to spend my happiest hours; but although

I am

I am weak, I certainly deserve your pity, and am in need of your advice and—consolation. My heart was always open to your observation; but, alas!" continued he, with a deep sigh, "it's most momentous concerns escaped your notice. I love, I adore the Countess Josephine, with a passion that has long lain dormant in my bosom, and which, as I fancied it esteem, I did not endeavour to combat; but it is now awakened, with all the violence that my quick sensibility is capable of feeling. Josephine is the first girl that ever fixed my attention, the first that ever moved my heart. You know how amiable she is. Can you therefore blame me for endeavouring to avoid danger, by keeping at a distance from it?"

Mrs. Wilmot was excessively hurt, as well as surprised, at what she heard. She considered a moment, and then said—"Have you informed Josephine of your love? Does she return it?"

"I could not conceal the passion she had

had inspired me with," returned Augustus; "and the syren voice of Hope urged me to make a declaration. It proved fallacious, but its suggestions were so powerful, that I was incapable of withstanding them. I am not indifferent to Josephine, but she loves her rank—her engagements—her duty, better than she does me. I am determined not to see her again. My tears shall not plead in my favour, nor bribe her to pity me. Absence will probably in time compose my ruffled mind: but my chief reliance and expectation of comfort depends on your soothing society, my dear mother, and my own endeavours to persuade myself that Josephine will be happy without me, and that every effort in my power would have been insufficient to repay her for what she must have relinquished to have made me so. I had nothing to offer her, but a heart that adored her, and——" Here he again threw himself into his mother's arms, and burst into a fresh flood of tears—"and a

mother replete with virtues, such as she will hardly find in the rank she is so fond of, and who would then have been her's!"

Disagreeable as the whole affair was to Mrs. Wilmot, who, knowing the serious and constant disposition of her son, as well as the acuteness of his feelings, justly apprehended that it would be attended with disagreeable consequences; yet her maternal heart easily excused the imprudence he had been guilty of, in making a declaration of his love to Josephine; and she determined to do all in her power to extinguish the flame that still blazed in his heart.

"Augustus," said she, "you have not fixed on the proper method to forget her. The path you are in, instead of removing you from Josephine, brings you nearer to her; for, avoid her as carefully as you can, she will, nevertheless, be present to your imagination, and at last no longer as a girl, but as a paragon of perfection, and therefore more dangerous to your

mind

mind than the sight of her person can be to your eye. No, accustom yourself to see her, and whilst you contemplate her beauties with delight (for, as I do not expect impossibilities, I know you cannot avoid doing so at first), repeat to yourself—'She is the bride of another! The sacred laws of honour compel me to be silent.' Your love will then, by degrees, be changed into friendship, and that Josephine's engagements does not forbid your entertaining for each other. Josephine herself will, without infringing the duties she is bound to fulfil, offer her hand to guide you out of the labyrinth into which love has led you."

A violent conflict passed in Wilmot's mind, for he wished to avoid, and yet ardently longed to see, Josephine; and as often as he contemplated her picture, which was the only comfort he enjoyed in his exile, his desire to see the dear original always awoke in his mind; and it had cost him much trouble, as he afterwards

wards confessed to his mother, to subdue it. Mrs. Wilmot removed his scruples; his heart urged him to comply; he yielded, and promised to come to her the next day.

Mrs. Wilmot left her son apparently easier than he really was, and returned home with a mind ruffled by a thousand uneasy reflections.

The affair was more painful to her than it is possible to express: she knew how Josephine was situated, and had often secretly pitied her in her own mind. As her intended marriage was entirely concluded by the parents of both parties, who found it convenient for their purposes, without either of them having in the least consulted their children's inclinations, she had cautiously watched over Josephine's heart, to keep it free. "She will be less unhappy," were that worthy woman's thoughts, "if she gives her hand to Woodmar, without having ever felt the power of love; and a little attention on his

his side, joined to the esteem that she must inspire the most thoughtless libertine with, and her happy ignorance, with the desire of pleasing, which is so natural to her, will perhaps render a marriage that was projected by avarice and ambition a happy one."

This was Mrs. Wilmot's opinion, and that induced her to keep Josephine as closely confined as she could with propriety. Her acquaintance with Augustus was so open and innocent (it remained so till he was seized with the unfortunate idea of painting her picture), so entirely within the limits of friendship, without the smallest sign of love, that their intimacy did not in the least alarm her. Josephine's pensiveness, which she attributed to her approaching separation from herself, which was to happen in a few months, her avoiding company, and seeking solitude, her dejected looks, and the tears that so frequently started into her eyes—all these things now appeared to Mrs.

Mrs. Wilmot in a very different light than she had seen them in before. She was mortified at the secresy that Josephine had observed, and at her concealing the true cause of her sorrow from her; but yet there was something so generous in the motive of her silence, that it forced her to excuse it, and esteem the girl who concealed her own sufferings that she might not communicate them to others: For must not the knowledge of a dear and deserving son's loving without hope have greatly pained a tender parent's heart?

CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

SHE went to her with a dejected countenance. "Augustus is ill!" said she.

Josephine's cheeks and lips changed to the colour of the dress she had on.—"Ill!" repeated she, in a trembling voice.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Wilmot; "a secret sorrow, perhaps an unfortunate love, preys upon his mind, and——"

"O my God!" exclaimed Josephine, wringing her hands as she sprang up from her chair, into which she, overpowered by weakness, sunk back again—"he will die! and I am his murderess!"

Mrs.

Mrs. Wilmot fixed her eyes stedfastly on her——"What's the matter with you, Josephine?" said she.

"O dearest, best of women, can you pardon me?—No, I never can forgive myself!" said the agitated girl. "Augustus loves me, and I love him; but prejudice, and the severity of my parents, which I, alas! am too well acquainted with, made me deprive him of every ray of hope, because I thought it my duty to do so. But it is now my duty to save him, and I must—I will fulfil it!"

"I little expected that you, Josephine," replied Mrs. Wilmot, in a chiding tone, "was capable of changing your mind so suddenly. Can you relinquish an intention that was the result of calm and mature consideration, because your feelings have received a momentary shock, and entail unceasing regrets on yourself for your imprudence as long as you live?"

Josephine blushed, and her eyes were stedfastly fixed on the ground.

"It

"It is true," said she, after a long pause, "that I thought it my duty to silence the secret voice within me, which spoke so loudly in Augustus's favour. I am indebted to my parents (who I am convinced will never approve my choice) for my life; but to you, best of women, I owe more than I do them: you taught me to be good, and guided my erring feet into the paths of peace and rectitude, by inculcating the precepts of virtue and religion into my mind, and giving a proper direction to my thoughts. If Augustus cannot live without me, as I am persuaded I never can be happy without him, allow me to give you the strongest proof in my power of my gratitude and affection, by willingly renouncing every pretension to splendor and riches, and by doing so, make both you and myself happy—you in a son, and myself in a husband, who we love with equal tenderness; and I am certain that Augustus's affection will more than

than repay me for the trifling sacrifices that I make on his account."

Tears started into her eyes as she spoke the following words :—" My parents !"

She stopped, too violently affected to be able to speak for a moment or two, and then proceeded with some degree of composure. " Yes, my parents ! — but you, my second mother, have likewise claims on my duty ; you approve—Oh, say you approve my love !"

" No, Josephine," said her deeply-affected friend ; " neither my son nor I can accept of the offer you make us. Your parents entrusted to my care their greatest treasure, their only hope : I cultivated the fruitful soil I found, and am greatly rewarded for the trouble your education cost me, by your obedience, and the attention you paid to my instructions. If you think I have acquired a right to your gratitude, oh then repay me, dearest Josephine, by persevering in your

your former intention, which will indeed prove most conducive to your tranquillity, as well as mine. Accept the hand of the husband that your parents have chosen for you, and honour my son with your friendship. He is not so ill as I represented him to you; but I was obliged to make use of that artifice, to come to an explanation which was so necessary for us both. The cordial of friendship will soon heal his wounded mind, and the thought that your happiness required his self-denial will greatly accelerate his cure. But be assured, that if he was even at the gates of death, that I would rather see him die than you waver in your duty. No, my dear child, forget a young man who, urged by passion, disclosed a secret to you which he ought to have eternally buried in his own bosom, and look forward with courage towards futurity, which, without him, will strew your path with flowers.

"The first awaking of our feelings often deceives young and inexperienced minds, that believe the happiness of their lives is entirely blasted, if circumstances oppose their wishes. Ah, Josephine! believe my experience, when I assure you that a first love seldom, I may almost say never, makes us happy: for it is only a vapour that infatuates the senses, which do not yet know what they desire, and when it evaporates—oh, what is then able to fill up the blank that we feel within ourselves! We arrive at the goal of our wishes (if we are permitted to do so) with over-strained expectation, and almost always perceive the fallacy of our flattering dreams, when we imagine that they are on the very point of changing into reality."

"Ah!" sighed Josephine, "shall I not always bewail my lot, if Augustus is not mine? How shall I be able to love another, if he reigns unrivalled in my mind?"

"Esteem

"Esteem and friendship," replied Mrs. Wilmot, "are sentiments that will supply the place of love, and long survive it. You will be happy, Josephine, if your future husband inspires you with both; and his lot will be more desirable than if you loved him as passionately as you perhaps love Augustus now."

"That is impossible!" said Josephine, with an incredulous look.

"Passion," continued Mrs. Wilmot, "deprives us of the mastery we ought to have over ourselves, and through which alone we are able to diffuse joy and comfort in the sphere we move in: it dims the perspicuity with which a mind that is disengaged views every object; and how can we, without that discerning look, perceive what affords pain or pleasure to the heart that we wish to render happy? Ah, Josephine! it is our lot to practise self-denial, to suppress the sighs of aspiration when they heave our bosom, and to pluck the roses that grow on our path of life,

 and

and strew the road that others wander with their leaves. Will you, my dear Josephine, refuse to fulfil this painful-pleasing task? and will not the consciousness of having purchased your parents' happiness, at what you now suppose the expence of your own, afford you some consolation, till the lenient hand of Time heals the wounds that still bleed?"

Josephine's eyes were moistened with tears. "Yes," exclaimed she, at last, "you are in the right, my dear, my maternal friend! I will resign myself to my fate; and I am sure you will assist me, if you perceive me stagger in my resolution. But pray tell me, Mrs. Wilmot, what is the reason that I, who used to judge myself and others with so much severity, am all at once become so weak? I formerly thought that an inward instinct, which I gloried in, would, in a manner, mechanically direct my choice; and that, as long as I followed it, I could not err, nor do any thing that was not pleasing to

myself.

myself. But now, obedience to my parents drags me into the thorny path of right, and inclination strongly opposes every step I take."

"That is no uncommon case with us egotistic mortals," was Mrs. Wilmot's answer. "We are extortionate in our demands on others, because we fancy that we, in similar cases, could perform what we demand of them. This too great dependence on ourselves often frustrates our purposes, exposes our weakness, and humbles us to the dust. We then perceive that it is easy to distinguish the good from the evil, but infinitely more difficult to practise the good ourselves, than to expect others to do so. But this knowledge of our own imperfections is not useless, for it makes us endure and pity the frailties of others, and strive to amend ourselves."

Josephine went into the garden, and seriously reflected on every thing that passed in her mind. Mrs. Wilmot's words

had

had by no means convinced her that all the esteem and friendship that she might in time feel for Woodmar would make her happier than it would be in the power of love and Augustus to do: for what argument could be persuasive enough to convince a girl of seventeen of any thing of the kind? But they had awakened a dawn of hope in her mind, that some thinly-scattered roses might adorn the thorny futurity that she looked forward to with so much terror. She reflected on every thing again and again, and at last persuaded herself that there was something great and magnanimous in sacrificing her inclination to duty, and patiently resigning herself to her sad fate. Even the melancholy ideas that her unhappy love suggested were pleasing to her, and strengthened her in the resolution of persevering. Alas! pleasure is less necessary to the human heart than pain; perhaps because it is earlier acquainted with the latter than the former.

Her

Her fancy represented Augustus to her bathed in tears, and a face bleached by sorrow and disappointment. She stretched out her arms, to fold the much-loved form that imagination created to her bosom; but recollecting that, as the destined wife of another, it was improper to do so, she suddenly drew them back. This sacrifice of inclination, which she offered as a tribute of duty to her unknown bridegroom, filled her mind, by degrees, not with disgust, but with pity, and that gentle regard which delicate minds always feel for those on whose account they do much, suffer much, and are obliged to forget much.

"It is true," said she, "that the difference in our rank places an insuperable bar between Augustus, my parents, and me, which I ought not, dare not strive to leap over. Does not duty and gratitude oblige me to prefer the happiness of those to whom I am indebted for my existence

to my own? and does not theirs consist in seeing me rich and great?"

Josephine paused, and then continued—"But the law of nature does not require us to sacrifice our own happiness for the sake of others, and it is hard, very hard, to be obliged to do so. Have parents a right to exact blind obedience, when the happiness or misery of their only child is at stake?"

Josephine paused again, and, after silently and solemnly vowing implicit obedience to her parents, she continued her monologue in the following words:—"Yes, I will obey them, and I will do so for my own sake; for the thought of having acted ungratefully and wrong, would embitter every joy that love could offer, and be a worm that would continually harass my mind. But, by renouncing every smiling hope, and bidding an eternal farewell to happiness in this life, by giving my hand to the man that my deeply-wounded heart

heart can never love, the certainty of having performed my duty will be a mitigating balm to the wound that was inflicted by the cruel hand of Fate."

Augustus came at the time he had promised his mother, and Josephine flew to meet him, and offered him her trembling hand, which he hastily pressed to his lips. Mrs. Wilmot, who was present, was extremely uneasy, as it was impossible for her to divine how the present scene would end.

"Augustus!" said Josephine, in a steady but grave and mournful voice, "receive, with this pressure of my hand, the assurance of my eternal friendship. I can never be more than friend to you, but that I will remain, as long as these eyes are open, and these lips are able to pronounce your name. I have combated with my heart, which is now calm—do you do so likewise with your's, Augustus. A man ought to have more power over himself than a poor weak girl. Surely, Wilmot,

 you

you are not master of less fortitude than I supposed you to be! I hope I did not deceive myself when I, as I dare not return your love, expected you to support a fate that is unavoidable, with as much courage as I do. Tell me that you are not angry with me for being a dutiful daughter, although my obedience costs us both so much."

Augustus concealed his streaming eyes with his pocket-handkerchief. "There is a future state," replied he, "that will be free from the prejudices that reign in this; and there my prophetic mind presages that we shall meet again: till then, eternal friendship!"

Mrs. Wilmot embraced them both.—"Be stedfast, my dear children," said she, and they promised to be so.

Their former way of life was again recommenced, but that pleasing ingenuity which was the effect of the happy ignorance of the state of their minds, that afforded the greatest charm to their conversation,

versation, was wanting. Augustus saw Josephine every day, and the flame of love, although apparently quenched, continued to burn secretly, with unabated violence, within them. When Mrs. Wilmot was present, they carefully watched over all their words and motions, but when they were alone, profound and long suppressed sighs frequently escaped Josephine, which found their echo in Augustus's bosom. They at such times looked at each other with eyes bedewed with tears, and then hastily snatched up a book, or work, or any thing that was at hand, to conceal them. Augustus played with her silky ringlets as often as he could do so unobserved, with a rapture that thrilled his very soul; and even the accidental touch of any part of her dress, when she happened to pass him, made his heart palpitate. Josephine's eyes were mournfully fixed on Wilmot's elegant form, when he looked another way; but if their eyes happened to meet, she cast

 her's

her's down, and coloured, and they often swam in tears when she raised them up again.

Her favourite employment was drawing, to which she devoted the greatest part of her time, of which she, in every thing else, was a great economist, that she might have the more to squander away on that. She would sit, for hours together, and contemplate the pictures that lay upon the table before her with eager eyes, for Augustus had drawn them, and love animated her pencil when she copied any work of his. She preferred the loneliest views, which her imagination transformed into an Elysium, when she, in idea, inhabited them with Augustus. She fondly nourished those pleasing thoughts, which always raised her spirits, although she was convinced of the impossibility of their ever being realized. Her glowing fancy placed her, as if by the power of enchantment, in a heaven of love, from which she was so far removed, and en-

graved the resemblance of her lover still deeper and deeper on her mind.

They were both silent, but their silence was more dangerous than the warmest effusions of their oppressed hearts would have been; for every complaint that must be suppressed, every tear that is obliged to flow in secret, and every sigh which stolenly mingles with the wind, is a dagger to the wounded mind; for only the sorrow that we dare impart can be relieved.

CHAP.

CHAP. IX.

THE summer passed in the manner just described; and one fine morning, in the beginning of September, Augustus and Josephine were seated upon a bench in a sunny part of the garden. "How transient is every thing in this world!" said Wilmot, pointing to a bed of faded flowers. "A few days ago, how blooming and beautiful they were! and now—— We did not gather those flowers, because we fancied their duration would be longer, and see how Nature has punished our delay! When shall we weak, short-sighted mortals, learn to employ the present moment?

moment? In a few weeks we shall probably be separated for ever. How many days and hours passed away without my seeing you! and who knows how sparingly Fate has measured those to me in which I shall still behold you? And yet the remembrance of you, of your kindness to me, your virtues, and even of those hours in which my chief employment was thinking of you, is all that can interweave a ray of melancholy comfort in my future sad existence. How often shall I renew the recollection of those irretrievable times in which your mind expanded itself to my view! how often recall to my thoughts the blissful hours we spent together, when they are flown away like a pleasing dream, and all that remains to me of you will be your picture and my regrets!"

"O do not believe, Wilmot," said Josephine, with streaming eyes, "that I shall reflect on these never-to-be-forgotten years with less regret than you will; or,

when

when forced from a retirement in which I felt myself so happy, into new connexions, that I shudder at the thought of, and into a vortex of vain and tumultuous pleasures, which I regarded with an eye of indifference when they were at a distance, without ever wishing to partake of them, that I shall not then sigh for the domestic comforts and serene joys that this abode of peace and innocence afforded me!—Ah, Wilmot! a sensation—I know not how to call it, oppresses my bosom, when I think of future times! Here, under the azure canopy of that heaven which sees the conflict which at this moment rages in my bosom, I vow eternal friendship to you!—not in the cold and common meaning of the expression, no, in the full and sacred extent of the word—in this as well as in a future life. A combination of unfortunate circumstances separates us in this world, but they cannot dissolve the band that unites our souls!"

Augustus

Augustus wept upon her hand, and a milder and more pleasing sensation than the turbulent desires that had hitherto agitated his breast, took possession of it:— "Yes, Wilmot," continued she, with increasing warmth, and a gleam of pleasure sparkled in her eyes as she spoke, "you shall always be my first, my best, my most confidential friend; I will repose all my sorrows in your bosom, and you shall share every joy that I may perhaps find thinly scattered on my future path of life. Accept, then, as I dare not call you lover, the appellation of brother, and, as a sister, I shall be allowed to express all the friendship and esteem I feel for you. A sister may, without impropriety, communicate every circumstance to her brother that affords her either pain or pleasure; and should I be obliged to mask my sorrow from every eye, you, and you alone, shall be informed of the true state of my mind, that you may lament, with me, that a heart so capable of loving as mine,

should be so cruelly sacrificed to pride and ambition."

They sunk into each others arms, in a long and speechless embrace. Augustus trembled as he clasped her to his bosom, but Josephine pressed him to her's, and returned his kisses with all the innocence and purity that the affinity, which she had just invented to allay her sorrow, without being criminal, allowed. The serenity and resignation of a suffering angel glistened in the mild glances with which she returned the eager looks that Augustus darted at her.

Mrs. Wilmot approached them slowly, and in evident confusion. "Now, Josephine," said she, "the time is come that will require an exertion of all your courage and fortitude. A messenger is just arrived from your parents, with this letter for you, and one to me, which——" (Here her voice faltered) "informs me we must part!"

Josephine looked at the letter, and turned pale, as soon as she saw it came from her mother. Augustus stood as immoveable as a statue.

As soon as the first shock was a little over, Wilmot recovered himself sufficiently to pick up the letter, which had dropped from Josephine's trembling hand, and said, with a tolerable degree of composure—"Read it, Josephine; it cannot contain any thing worse than we know already: perhaps—" and a small degree of sharpness mixed itself in the sound of his voice as he spoke—"perhaps your wedding-day is fixed in it!—but nothing can separate us!—No, Josephine! the friendship that unites our minds will prove as lasting as the eternity that awaits us on yon side of the grave!"

Josephine opened the dreaded letter with an aching heart: the anguish that tortured it increased with every line she read; and when she had finished it, her

eyes were dim, large drops of sweat rolled down her forehead, the paper fell upon the ground, as she would have done herself, if Augustus had not caught her in his arms, as she fainted away.

This was the maternal letter:—

"As soon as you receive this, you must prepare for your departure; and soon after your return home, you will receive from your parents' hands the husband they have chosen for you. We do not a little pride ourselves on the choice we have made, for Count Charles Woodmar's person, sense, riches, and rank, make him one of the most desirable matches in the kingdom. The twentieth of October is fixed for your wedding-day; therefore do not delay your return an hour longer than is necessary.—I shall send Clements for you; and you may

may expect her and the carriage two days after you receive this letter.

"I am my dear Josephine's
"Affectionate mother,
"CAROLINE D'ERKER."

"Josephine!—dearest, best of girls!" exclaimed Augustus, as he pressed the amiable creature, who suffered so much on his account, to his bosom—"recover!—take courage!—calm yourself!"

Josephine opened her languid eyes, and a faint colour overspread her lily cheeks, when she perceived that she was in her lover's arms. How pleasing was her recovery!—for all that had happened seemed to her like a frightful dream, from which she was just awaked. She smiled, and for an instant forgot the load of sorrows that so sorely oppressed her, till a sight of the fatal letter brought them back to her memory, and too sadly convinced her that all

all that had happened was no illusion. The cold shivering that ran through all her veins, on finding her marriage so near, had taught her how very dear Augustus was to her heart. When that dreaded event appeared to her at a great distance, she fancied herself strong enough to conquer her love, and, in obedience to her parents' will, give her hand to the man they had chosen for her. It seemed to her to be a mark of a great and elevated mind, to be able to subdue inclination, and render it subservient to stern duty; and the high opinion she entertained of her own fortitude, as well as the power she possessed over herself, did not suffer her to harbour a doubt of her proving victorious on this occasion: nay, she sometimes, in the hours of calm reflection, secretly exulted at having an opportunity of exerting her strength. But now that the idea of a near and, probably, an eternal separation, had, with a number of other aggravating circumstances, taken possess-

possession of her mind—now that her attachment to her amiable friend augmented daily, and she felt how happy she should be with him—now the silent tear rolled in torrents down her cheeks, and entirely washed away the bounds that pride supposed invincible.

"But," said she to herself, when she was alone, "is he really irrecoverably lost to me? have I made a single trial to rescue the happiness of my future life?—I will at least attempt it. I will speak to my mother, and open my heart to her, a heart that is only capable of returning Augustus's love. It is impossible for a mother to be indifferent, when the happiness or misery of an only child is at stake. What mother can be cruel enough to force her daughter into engagements that her heart recoils at!"

Hope, although it was frequently mingled with secret and painful suspicions and fear, predominated in Josephine's bosom, and

and determined her to persevere in her intention.

"Have I not," continued she, in her soliloquy, "already performed my duty, in the painful efforts I made to obey my parents?' and is not the wish to ascertain our own happiness, by the means we think best able to do so, too deeply implanted in every bosom, to be a sin?—To be sure the world will censure a step that does not agree with its notions of propriety: but what is the opinion of the world, compared to a long life of misery? Thrown away on a man I do not know, a mercenary man, who only chose me on account of the riches that are unhappily mine—must I live for the world? Shall I not find every thing that it can deprive me of, and infinitely more, in the confined circle of domestic happiness?—Yes, a contented mind will enable me to disregard its approbation, or censure. My Augustus's love, a retired country life, his

mother's company, and my parents' consent—O my God! that would be too great a degree of happiness for a heart that began to despair of Heaven's having any in store for it!"

The pleasing ideas of imaginary bliss that Josephine so fondly nourished, enabled her to think of her departure with some degree of composure. She recalled the remembrance of her parents to her mind, which, as their long separation had rendered them almost strangers to each other, could neither encourage her hopes nor depress them. Their meeting, after so many years of absence, would, she believed, dissolve the crust of ice that avarice and ambition had gathered round their hearts; and this supposition was so highly pleasing to her, that she turned away her thoughts from every thing that could lessen it.

But that was not the case with Augustus, for it seemed to him that with Josephine he should lose the better part of his own existence.

existence. When the hour that was fixed for parting struck, a deathlike paleness overspread his countenance; and when the sound no longer pained his ear, it continued to echo in his mind like the knell of all his departed joys. Josephine had concealed her intention from him, that she might have the pleasure of surprising him with this unexpected proof of her affection, if she succeeded. Her eyes were free from tears, but the looks that she directed to Augustus were expressive, and vowed, as well as demanded, constancy.

Mrs. Wilmot folded her in her arms, and wept; and Josephine tenderly embraced her indulgent friend, her more than mother, whilst she thanked her, in the most grateful terms, for the innumerable proofs of kindness and affection that she had received from her. "We shall soon see each other again!" said she, in a whisper, as she gave Mrs. Wilmot the last kiss, with a look that vouched the truth of

of her assertion; "and perhaps we shall then be happy!"

She gave her hand to Augustus (who stood immoveable and quite absorbed in sorrow) with a smile, but which almost immediately changed into a look of heartfelt woe, that was caused by a sad foreboding which at that moment suddenly darted across her mind.

"Farewell!" said she, in a low and tremulous voice, and eyes bathed in tears; "farewell, Augustus! I will write to you, always think on you, and never—never forget you!"

She then dried her eyes, and hurried into the carriage, which swiftly flew away with her and her sorrow.

Mrs. Clements, who was in the carriage with Josephine, was not a little surprised at her young lady's excessive grief, and thought it her duty to strive to dispel it, which she, good-naturedly, determined to do.

Josephine, who was not much inclined to talk, sat silent and thoughtful, and reviewed the plan she had formed, which she, according to the ebb or flow of her mind, saw alternately succeed and fail.

"Your Ladyship seems to be low-spirited," said Mrs. Clements, at last; "and I think nobody in the world has so much reason to be happy as you have. Oh, if you knew how handsome the young Count is, how charmingly he looks when he drives into the court-yard in his high phaeton and six spirited horses, I am sure you would be pleased!"

"Happy creature!" sighed Josephine, "who perhaps envies me for the splendor that I despise!—Ah! how gladly would I," continued she, turning to her companion, "resign Count Woodmar, his horses, phaeton, and all his riches, to you, if, by doing so, I could purchase a mind as easy and contented as your's, and

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be satisfied with the happy mediocrity that will probably fall to your lot!"

The young woman shook her head, as if she doubted the truth of Josephine's words, nor could she by any means comprehend the meaning of them. The Countess was silent during the greatest part of the journey, and her sadness increased, the nearer she drew towards the end of it. They at last arrived at a villa that belonged to her father, where, by her mother's orders, she was to sleep the last night of her journey. It was still light enough to enable her to discern, from the top of a woody hill, the spires of her father's Castle: the sight forced large drops of tears into her eyes, and she shuddered when she thought how soon her fate would be decided.

CHAP. X.

JOSEPHINE delayed her departure the next morning as long as she was able, for she could there enjoy the luxury of indulging her reveries undisturbed; and she did so with a painful delight, which was increased by the serenity of nature, for it was a fine clear day in the middle of September; not a cloud appeared in the azure sky, and the bleakness of the air was tempered by the warm and cheering beams of the morning sun. She went into the garden, with a mind painfully oppressed by the restlessness of suspence, when she all at once heard a rustling noise behind

behind her, that resembled the footsteps of a man. She turned round, and saw a gentleman approaching her with hasty steps. Her bosom heaved with apprehension; her colour went and came; and, with a confusion that rendered her incapable of speaking, she returned the stranger's salute, who, in an easy, graceful manner, presented himself to her as Charles Woodmar, her lover.

They stood opposite to each other for some moments, without speaking. Woodmar was, however, more attentive than Josephine, who, with a forced smile, strove to conquer the sadness her eyes expressed, or at least conceal from the sight of the man, who regarded her with eager and penetrating glances, the tears that were ready to start into them: but her efforts were vain—they proceeded from too full a heart to be checked; and, unable to prevent them, they rolled in torrents down her burning cheeks.

The Count regarded her some time with looks of silent astonishment, but he at last seized hold of one of her hands and pressed it to his lips.—" These beautiful eyes," said he, in a tender voice, " shall never shed another tear, if it is in my power to remove every cause of uneasiness from your mind."

" Our parents have decided our fate," replied Josephine, in low and trembling accents, without looking at him—" May your Lordship's engagement with me not disturb a happier one !"

Woodmar thought of Maria, and an involuntary sigh, occasioned by the recollection of her charms, and what had so recently passed between them, escaped him: but he was better able to conceal an aching heart with a smiling countenance than his fair companion ; and gaily throwing his arm round her waist, he assured her, with all the eloquence he was master of, that the report of her beauty, and the charming

charming image his mind had formed in consequence of it, and which he now found more than realized, had so entirely engrossed his attention, that it had prevented his wasting a thought on another object.

Josephine, whose exalted mind always felt the desire of giving more than she received, blushed, and secretly lamented that it would never be in her power to return the affection that the Count expressed for her. She found him much handsomer and more agreeable than she had supposed him to be; for the ill-humour with which she had always thought of the person who she regarded as the sole obstacle to her happiness, and the presence of Augustus, was by no means favourable to the picture that her fancy sketched of his rival, who she represented to herself ill-favoured, formal, haughty, and morose, which were faults that she could not discover the slightest trace of in the person who stood before her,

her, and who possessed the contrary qualities in an eminent degree. But this discovery was far from alienating her affection from the man who (without possessing the brilliant attractions that the Count was master of) had inspired her with the tenderest, the truest love, and still reigned without a competitor in her heart; or of making her intention waver. She determined to speak to her mother first, and inform her of the real state of her mind, and afterwards to Woodmar, who she believed would be generous enough to resign her voluntarily, as soon as he knew that her affections were pre-engaged.

They set off together in the elegant phaeton he came to meet her in, which Mrs. Clements had so highly commended. She accepted his offer, and seated herself by his side, without making the least objection, and her attendant followed in the other carriage.

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"What a handsome couple!" was murmured by the people who were assembled at the gate, to see the bride and bridegroom set off; and they both shewed the difference there was in their way of thinking, by the manner in which they received this impartial praise.

Josephine modestly drew her veil over her blushing face, as soon as she had bowed, in a kind and civil manner, to her father's tenants and domestics; for she preferred concealing herself to dazzling. The Count, on the contrary, could not conceal the satisfaction he felt; his eyes roved about with a look of triumphant pleasure: to shew his really fine form to more advantage, he took hold of the reins and guided them standing, and thereby excited, still more, the admiration that was so grateful to his ear.

As soon as they were out of the sight of the gazing crowd, he seated himself by his fair companion, who, as soon as she found herself unobserved, removed the

gauze from her face, that so enviously concealed the beauty of the day from her sight.

They spoke but little to each other on the road, but they thought the more: Josephine's mind retraced the rosy hours that were past, the little probability there was of her ever spending such happy ones again, and her fancy dwelt, with secret sorrow, on the objects of her tenderest affection that she had so lately left. The Count, without disturbing Josephine in her reveries, compared her to Maria:—they were both handsome, but their beauty was of a very different kind—Josephine was a majestic, Maria a languishing beauty. The recollection of the extreme tenderness the latter had felt for him, made her appear to his imagination still more lovely and engaging than she had ever done before; and the ardent desire he felt to see her again, and conquer her scruples, by some means or other, awakened, with redoubled violence, in his mind at that moment.

ment. A deep sigh, caused by the little probability there was of his success, escaped him unawares, and recalled Josephine's scattered thoughts. She looked timidly at him, for she had not courage to enquire the reason of his sighing, and was far from suspecting the true cause of it. Woodmar, who was too much a man of the world to feel any embarrassment on such an occasion, or not to be able to turn even contrary circumstances to his advantage, gave her to understand, by polite and well-turned hints, that she was the cause of his sighs.

The evening sun blazed like molten gold, when they arrived at the place of their destination: the large bow-windows reflected the expiring beams, and looked like burning glass; and Josephine's heart misgave her, as soon as she saw the magnificent building that lay before her in the mild shade of twilight. She was received by a great number of domestics, with such servile respect, that she was at no loss

to

to guess in what manner they were treated by her parents.

Woodmar guided her tottering steps to the saloon, where the family was assembled. Josephine's mind was agitated, and at the same time tenderly affected, by the sight of her parents, who she both loved and honoured; for her heart was uncorrupted and her principles good, and they irresistibly drew her towards the authors of her being. She sunk upon her knees, in a dutiful and affectionate manner, as soon as she approached them, and pressed her mother's hand to her lips, which she bedewed with tears, that the mingled sensations of pain and pleasure, that contended in her mind at that moment, occasioned.

The company assembled was numerous, and an almost solemn silence reigned in the room, that was but ill calculated to cheer Josephine's drooping spirits. Her father's looks struck her as peculiarly cold and dismal, as he at different times surveyed her person and behaviour with disap-

disapproving glances. She therefore gladly obeyed his orders to retire and change her dress, as the constraint she felt was extremely painful to her. She ran to a window, as soon as she entered the *suite* of apartments that was destined for her, which afforded a delightful prospect of the charming vallies that surrounded the Castle, which stood upon an eminence. Her eye eagerly sought out the road she had just travelled, that lost itself at a distance in a dark winding. Tears forced themselves into her eyes, and her bosom was oppressed; for all her courage had flown from her with the setting sun; and her looks were mournfully fixed on the long shadows of its last beams, that were still visible in the meadow beneath her, when the large folding doors were suddenly thrown open, and her mother entered the room.

"Excuse my coming unawares, Josephine," said she; "but I hope my unexpected visit will convince you how sincerely

cerely I am your friend. Your father is not quite satisfied with your manner of presenting yourself; and I must own there was something extremely romantic in your kneeling and bursting into tears: we, however, place it to the account of the plebeian education you have received, and hope the good company that you will in future frequent will soon rub off the rust that you contracted at school. However, to obliterate the unfavourable impression that your first appearance made on your father, it will be necessary to be extremely on your guard for the future; and I will be your guide and counsellor, in cases that require advice and experience. In the first place, you must dress yourself as elegantly as possible, and make use of these jewels, which Count Woodmar has commissioned me to present to you in his name."

Josephine took the jewel-case out of her mother's hand, and shuddered as she laid it upon the table.

The

The Countess d'Erker was artful, and agreeable when she thought it her interest to be so. She had more gentleness in her countenance than in her heart, more sense in her eyes than in her head, and knew better how to inspire confidence than deserve it.

Josephine was deceived by the air of maternal tenderness that she assumed, and thought that this was, perhaps the only, or at least the best, opportunity she should ever have to make the dreaded trial, on which the happiness or misery of her future life depended—and she did so with a palpitating heart.

"O my dear mother!" said she, in an imploring voice, "if I behaved otherwise than I ought to have done, I hope you will attribute it to my ignorance of the customs and manners of the great world. Forgive the sorrow with which I am overwhelmed, and which can never, never be removed, unless you, my dearest mother, will

will kindly condescend to assist your unhappy daughter."

The Countess stared at her. "It is impossible for me, Josephine," said she, "to comprehend the meaning of your words, unless you express yourself in plainer terms. What cause of sorrow can you possibly have, when every circumstance combines to render you happy?"

The Countess embraced her daughter, who fondly clung to that bosom in which she expected to find sympathy. "Ah!" exclaimed she, "can all the pomp and splendor that is prepared for me, or the superfluities that I look forward to with dread, requite me for the pangs of hopeless love?"

The Countess extricated herself from her daughter's encircling arms, stepped a few paces back, and sternly rivetted her eyes on her face. The lovely girl was in the most violent agitation.—"Yes," continued she, with the warmth of desperation,

tion, that risks every thing, because it knows that it must either venture or lose all—"yes, I love—love a youth, whose exalted sentiments elevate him more than the noblest birth could do!"

The Countess sunk speechless into a chair, and Josephine informed her of every thing.

"Miserable, unworthy wretch!" were the first words that the old Countess's rage permitted her to articulate. "Hast thou the courage to entertain a thought of a misalliance? and, what almost exceeds human conception, the audacity to mention it to me!—thou disgrace to thy family, that entertained such high notions of thee!"

She would probably have continued in this strain some time longer, if a servant had not entered and announced Count Woodmar, who immediately followed him. A dead calm instantaneously took possession of her features, and chaced away every trace of the storm that had just

just before ruffled them. She rose from her seat, and turned, with a smile, to Woodmar, whose eyes were fixed on his pale and dejected bride with looks of tender concern.

"Come, my dear Count," said she, "we will leave Josephine, that she may have time to dress—the air has given the poor child the head-ache.—O! I almost forgot to tell you, my dear," continued she, turning to her daughter, "that the marriage articles are to be signed to-night.—Josephine is infinitely obliged to you, Count Woodmar, for the jewels;—she has not had leisure to look at them yet, but I am certain she will admire them as much as I do."

She took hold of the Count's arm as she pronounced the last words, and partly dragged him out of the room.

Poor Josephine! her last hope, and the dream with which she had so often strove to lull her sorrows to sleep, were fled for ever. She threw herself upon

the sofa, and gave way to the anguish that the entire annihilation of all her hopes and expectations occasioned, and at last burst into a flood of tears, which a little calmed her perturbed spirits.

Mrs. Clements came into the room to dress her young lady, and her curiosity to see the beautiful diamonds was so great, that she had with difficulty made her patience eke out till the old Countess was gone. She contemplated the glittering ornaments one after the other, with a good-natured kind of envy, and could not conceive what reason any body, who was mistress of such jewels, could have to be uneasy.

CHAP.

CHAP. XI.

JOSEPHINE was not able to obey her mother's orders that day; for although, thanks to Mrs. Clements' assiduous care, she was dressed with the utmost taste and elegance, and had even the Count's picture, that was richly set with diamonds, and fastened to a row of pearls, tied round her neck, yet, as soon as the bridal ornaments were all put on, she sunk into a state of total insensibility, which terminated in a high fever.

Mrs. Clements ran to inform the family of this melancholy event, which surprised

prised every body except the Countess. Woodmar, who, if he did not love, at least admired her beauty, and felt himself warmly interested in every thing that concerned her, hastened to her room as soon as he heard she was ill, without asking any questions.

She lay upon the sofa as pale as a lily, and pearly drops, that rivalled in beauty those that encircled her neck, forced their way through her closed eyelids. The Countess ordered Mrs. Clements to put her daughter to bed, and then very composedly went away with the rest.

Josephine remained in a state of delirium for several days; but when she recovered her senses, and her mind was capable of calmly reflecting on what had happened, she formed a determination that was worthy of her. She determined to sacrifice her inclination to her parents' will; and, painful as the task was, to obey them without murmuring.

Her

Her amendment was slow; and she patiently endured the bitter reproaches that her mother continually made her when they were alone, or the only reply she made to them was the promise to obey her commands. She even strove to forget the object of her love; but that was an impossibility; for, as the creeping ivy twines itself round a mouldering wall, recollection fondly clings to the wreck of its former joys.

Woodmar perceived the inward conflict that passed in Josephine's bosom: she was polite and kind to every body, and behaved to him with distinguished attention and regard; but how cold did her assurances of esteem appear to him, when he compared them to the warmth of [illegible]'s demonstrations of love! His [illegible] wounded—duty and secret ap[illegible] did not suffice his vanity, fo[illegible] quired love, although he did n[illegible] himself.

"How differently did Maria behave!" would he often say, when his discontented mind felt the desire of being loved. The remembrance of her charms, her obstinate resistance, and even the distrust she placed in herself, by cautiously avoiding the sight of him, returned fresh to his imagination, and heightened his desire of possessing her: but his wish was vain, for Maria's virtue was impregnable; and even if his approaching marriage with Josephine had not been an insurmountable obstacle, the lowness of Maria's birth would, in spite of her attractions and his love, have prevented his ever entertaining a thought of legally marrying

ime that was fixed for the celebra-
he marriage drew near, and Jose-
ked forward to the awful day
sorrow, which she only gave
hen she was alone. Her beha-
Woodmar was uniform, polite,
ive; complaints never relieved

her heart, and, silent as resignation, she often endeavoured to force a smile, whilst her heart felt as if it would break; and only in the lonely midnight hour, or when she fancied herself quite unobserved, would she indulge in the luxury of woe that tears afforded.

A few days before the dreaded twentieth of October, she summoned up resolution enough to inform Augustus of the decision of her fate, and the resolution she had formed of not entering into a correspondence with him, as she had promised to do. She did so, with an aching heart, in these words:—

"The last da
that secretly cheered my da
solated mind, at the moment
is now entirely vanished from
is no alternative; I must mar

my parents have chosen, and I will endeavour to make him as happy as I can.

"O, Wilmot! do not suppose I found the task of resigning you an easy one; but I strive to banish every thought that may encourage me to murmur at my fate. The expectation that a conscientious performance of my duty encourages me to entertain of another and a better life, where I can openly avow my sentiments, is alone able to comfort me for the inseparable loss of you in this.

"Farewell, most dear and highly esteemed friend of the best and happiest years of my life! Accept the thanks of your absent Josephine, for your love and fidelity to her; and be assured that, although it was not in her power to reward them, no heart could feel their value, or be more thoroughly convinced of their worth, than her's. It will be some years before I shall write to you again, and then, perhaps, (God send it may be so) my pen will no longer be guided by passion;

then

then I hope the wishes that my heart has so long and fondly nourished, will, as Fate does not deem fit to fulfil them, have consumed themselves, and my love be changed into what it ought to be, calm and sincere friendship, without the least alloy of passion. It will not be in the power of time to efface your remembrance from my mind—it will only soften the impression; and in the colder language of friendship our hearts will continue to understand each other. Adieu!"

The appointed day at length arrived, and Josephine's heart sunk within her.—Woodmar had, in spite of her endeavours to appear cheerful, perceived that a secret sorrow preyed upon her mind; and the languor of her eyes, as well as her excessive paleness, discovered what she anxiously strove to conceal.

"Is any thing the matter with

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Countess Josephine?" said Woodmar, with a look of angry wonder, as he entered her room, to conduct her to the drawing-room, where their hands were to be united, and found her pale, trembling, and in tears.

"Your sorrow is too excessive, and of too long duration, merely to proceed from delicacy, as your mother endeavours to persuade me it does. Perhaps you have formed an alarming idea of the marriage state; but if that is the case, I beg you will tranquillize yourself, for I assure you, upon my honour, that every thing in my power shall be done to render Hymen's chains as easy to you as possible: or," continued he, lowering his voice, and fixing his eyes on her with a scrutinizing look, "does your unwillingness to marry proceed from an aversion to me, and an attachment to another? Have I been unfortunate enough to interrupt the happiness of a more fortunate, perhaps a more deserving man, without knowing

 it?

it? Your secret sorrow, charming Josephine, has not escaped my notice, although it may seem to have done so to you. Speak!—tell me the cause of it?"

Josephine, for the first time, rushed into the Count's arms, with a warmth that the mention of her sorrows inspired.—"Count Woodmar," said she, "I hope you will prove indulgent to the weakness of a heart that is not quite happy. I own and feel that I ought to have behaved to you with more tenderness than I have hitherto done; and I lament that it was not in my power to do so: but have patience with me, my dear friend, and be assured, that although my love is not of the passionate kind, which soon evaporates, (and on so short an acquaintance as ours, how is it possible for you to expect it?) that my duty will ever be sacred to me, and that your happiness will always be as dear to me as my own."

The Count was by no means satisfied with an answer that humbled his pride, and contained,

contained, in pretty plain terms, a confession that she loved another. But Josephine looked so interesting in her sorrow, that the Count contemplated her some time with a cruel satisfaction: her beauty was, however, all he regarded; for he only saw her lovely eyes, and not the tears that streamed from them—and her alabaster bosom, and not the sighs that heaved it. He stood undetermined for a moment or two, if he should let her feel the displeasure her words had given him or not; but her beauty was an advocate that he could not withstand, and a tender embrace was his only reply.

Josephine accompanied the Count into the saloon, where the blaze of wax candles rivalled the lustre of the sun, with some degree of tranquillity, and she pronounced the solemn "Yes," in a low but steady voice.

"We are married, Josephine," said the Count to her, when they were alone; "but, that we may both be happy, we

will mutually agree not to lay the least constraint on each other. You are entire mistress of your time and actions; and the delicacy of your mind will, I am convinced, notwithstanding your youth, prevent your ever doing any thing unworthy of my love and name, or that may tarnish a reputation that it is your duty to keep unspotted, for my sake as well as your own. A fond couple are objects of ridicule to the fashionable world; and I own I am too proud to be laughed at, as I most undoubtedly should be, if I seemed in love with my wife: if, therefore, I do not seem to remark your amiable qualifications so much in company, as you may perhaps be inclined to expect, and seem to avoid those beautiful eyes, that I am so eager to meet at home, do not blame me for my apparent neglect, but place it to the account of the caprice of fashion, that one is obliged to comply with in this foolish world. I will rather be censured than ridiculed; and, to avoid the

the latter, I must submit to this constraint."

Josephine listened attentively to what he said, and only answered him with a sigh. The looseness of his principles disgusted her, and added to the indifference she had before felt for him, which likewise operated on her behaviour, that was polite but cold.

The Count took her to one of his country-seats, a few days after their marriage, to shew it to her, before they removed to town for the winter, which he was impatient to do, as it was the place that his adored Maria inhabited.

The young Countess Woodmar (who we shall, however, continue to call Josephine) was accustomed to retirement, and, in her present turn of mind, not much disposed to relish the amusements of the town: she once expressed a wish to spend the winter in the place she was in, which her husband did not in the least object to, as the difference in their way of

thinking placed an insurmountable bar between them, which neither of them wished, nor endeavoured to remove. Besides, Josephine's morality, which was rather of the severe and haughty kind, was as disgusting to the Count as her beauty was alluring, and often scared him away from her.

"But you will die of *ennui*, my dear Countess, if you spend the winter in this dismal place," said Woodmar, yawning.

"Oh no!" was Josephine's reply—"for I know how to employ my time in a useful and agreeable manner."

The Count made shift to hold out a month in the country, which he was heartily tired of; hunting was his only recreation, and one he was excessively fond of; but it could not entirely satisfy his mind, which sighed for calmer joys. Maria was, and remained, the principal object of his wishes, although he did all in his power to forget her. He, to drown reflection, invited a set of young libertines like himself, to pay him a visit, and endeavoured

to

to stifle the sighs of love with noisy mirth; but the memorial that is left by our departed joys cannot easily be effaced. He strove to banish it, by giving a loose to the reins of licentious desire, and engaging in scenes of riotous dissipation with his companions, whose minds were more corrupted than his own; and indeed the pleasing ideas of Maria, and his former happiness, were scared away by such tumultuous joys. But the delusion was only momentary, for as soon as reason resumed its empire over his mind, he felt more unhappy and discontented than ever.

A number of contrivances now continually occupied his thoughts, how he should be able to get Maria into his power; but the greatest part of them were rejected as soon as formed, by his knowledge of her perseverance and virtue. He however did not let his courage sink, for his chief dependence was on the remains of her love, and—deceit.

CHAP. XII.

THE moment at length arrived in which he was to bid a long farewell to his wife and the country, which he did with the greatest cheerfulness. Josephine likewise saw him depart without regret, as his presence was a great restraint on her; for duty, in her opinion, obliged her to conceal from his knowledge that she had bestowed her heart on another, and in the hour she gave him her hand, she vowed to herself to do so.

"No," said she, "all the consequences of this unhappy passion shall only affect myself. I will endure the misery I am

doomed to in silence, and without complaining, till my heart breaks, or forgets Augustus!"

The Count arrived safe in town, and his blood boiled as his carriage rolled past Maria's house. He looked up at the windows—but his doing so was vain, for he drove by without seeing any living creature.

The evening was drawing on apace when he arrived at his house, and the pleasing gloom of his dressing-room was favourable to his reminiscence of the past. He opened his escritoir, and took Maria's letter out of it—for, as it was his intention to forget her when he left town, he had not taken it with him—and the sight of it represented to his fancy, in the most lively colours, the bliss he had tasted in her arms. He started up, for it was impossible for him to delay visiting her till the next morning; and, wrapping himself up in a large surtout, he walked to her house with a palpitating heart.

The

The shop windows were shut; he rang the bell, and the door was opened by a strange woman, with a candle in her hand, who enquired what he wanted: and, on his asking for old Miller, she hastily replied—"Lord, Sir! don't you know that he has been dead these four months?"

Woodmar shuddered; but, recollecting himself, he hastily enquired what was become of his daughter?

"She has sold this house," was the woman's answer, "and lives with her aunt at the other end of the town."

He confusedly thanked her for the information and direction that she, by his desire, gave him, and left the desolated house, and returned to his equally solitary one, vexed and disappointed.

He found Maria's new habitation the next day, without the least difficulty, and his heart beat loud with tumultuous joy as he approached the house.

Maria's aunt maintained herself by embroidery, and that encouraged him to go

strait

strait to her, for Maria's anger did not promise him the best reception at first. He enquired for Mrs. Dempster, and was shewn into a small but decent apartment, where he found the aunt and niece working at their frames.

It is impossible to express the tumult of Woodmar's mind as he entered the room. Maria's sable dress, and the deep-felt sorrow that was visible in her whole being, made her appear so inexpressibly lovely and interesting, that it was impossible for the most indifferent person to behold her without being moved; and the lustre that tears had deprived her lovely eyes of, was more than replaced by the soft expressive melancholy that appeared in them. As soon as she turned her head round, and perceived the Count, a deathlike paleness overspread her cheeks, which the moment after changed to a crimson blush, and the needle dropped from her trembling fingers.

Woodmar approached in a timid manner, bowed to the old woman in a respectful one, and to Maria with apparent shame, confusion, and remorse, which he knew did not disfigure him. He desired Mrs. Dempster to shew him the patterns of her embroidery, as he intended to bespeak some waistcoats and other things.—She went to fetch them, and left the Count and her niece together.

Maria, who felt the danger of a *tête-à-tête* with him, hastily rose up, and was going to leave the room. The gracefulness of her mien enflamed the Count's desires to a still higher pitch, for she appeared to him a thousand times handsomer than she had ever done before: he, therefore, as soon as he perceived her intention, stepped before her, and placed his back against the door.

"Maria," said he, in the mild persuasive accents of love, that gently and internally touched the soft echoing chords of

of her feelings—"Maria, will you not listen to one word of excuse—one word of reconciliation?"

She turned from him, and concealed her weeping face with both her hands.

"O, Maria!" continued the Count, dropping on his knees, and, in spite of the resistance she made, clasping his arms round her, "can you forgive the man who so cruelly offended your angelic virtue? can you refuse to pardon the repentant sinner who kneels at your feet, and wishes to repair the fault that his folly induced him to commit?—Yes, I will own the truth. I went into the country with the intention of forgetting you, which I strove to do, for your image followed me like my shadow wherever I went, as well as the remembrance of your former love; but all my efforts to banish them from my mind were ineffectual; for all the rapturous hours of past times, all the joys that I tasted in your arms, and all

all the still more delightful ideas of futurity, that I hoped would be realized, combined to render my life miserable without you. And will you reject me, Maria, when only your hand can guide my erring feet into the path of rectitude? Can you bar your heart against the man who you once so tenderly loved, and who now deserves the love which he owns with shame that he was formerly unworthy of?"

Maria raised her eyes from the ground, and fixed them on the Count.—"Oh! why," said she, in a calm pathetic voice, "do you remind me of times that appear like a dream to me? why do you disturb the tranquillity my retirement afforded, by your presence?"

"To—," exclaimed Woodmar, in a transport of joy, at hearing her speak so mildly—"to give my adored girl the highest proof in my power of the sincerity of my love and repentance, by offering to make her my wife."

Maria

Maria looked stedfastly at her lover, who almost devoured her with his eyes.—"If," sighed she to herself, "this is a dream, kind Heaven send that I may never awake from it!"

Mrs. Dempster returned with the patterns, and was highly astonished at finding the handsome stranger kneeling to her niece, and her in tears. They were the joyful tears of reconciliation, in which she drowned the last sparks of her anger, and washed away the painful remembrance of the anguish that had so long tortured her mind.

Woodmar jumped up, told the old woman who he was, and at the same time informed her of his intention of marrying Maria: he was irresistible when he asked a favour, and doubly so, when he expected to gratify his desires by it.

Mrs. Dempster perceived that the acquaintance of the lovers had not commenced that day; nor did it require any great degree of perspicuity in her to discover

cover that Maria was violently in love with the handsome Count; and how was it possible to be otherwise? for her artless unsuspecting heart, that glowed with all the ardour of a first love, only saw Woodmar in the light he wished to appear in—that of a repentant and constant lover, whose attachment to her was so great that he willingly renounced all the advantages that rank and fortune offered him for her sake, and whose sole endeavour was to recompence her for the days of sorrow she had passed on his account. To be sure, some painful doubts at times arose in her mind, but they regarded herself more than the sincerity of her lover

"But can I," exclaimed she, and she timidly fixed her eyes on his face as she spoke, "will it ever be in my power to make you amends for what you will lose by me? Ah! consider well on the step you are going to take: you must then decline the splendid alliance you formerly mentioned to me, and which would undoubtedly

doubtedly be more suitable to your birth and fortune than a poor low-born girl, who has nothing, and knows nothing but how to love you. Will you never repent, when you are in company with the great ladies, who surpass your poor Maria in every respect, that you chose me for your companion through life? —— O, Charles!—dearest Charles!" continued she, "my heart is, and ever will be your's, but I will cheerfully resign every pretension to your hand, if you think it will not be in my power to render you as happy as you will me."

"Listen to what I am going to say, Maria," replied the Count—"I not only love, I adore you; and can only be happy with you, and with none but you. I should indeed be exceedingly glad if it was at this moment in my power to lay my fortune and title at your feet, and say—'Maria, share them with me!'—but I have a very ambitious father, whose disposition I am too well acquainted with, to

flatter

flatter myself with the least hope of ever being able to obtain his consent to our marriage; for deep-rooted prejudices are more sacred to him than the laws of nature; and his curse, as well as disinheritance, would be my inevitable lot, was I to venture to own my love to him: but if in me you only regard the man, and not the Count, if you prefer the calm joys of retirement with me, to the glittering, tasteless pleasures that it is not in my power to offer you at present, consent to a private marriage, till my father's death permits me to publish the pleasing bands that unite us. I have a sequestered seat in a remote part of the country, which will conceal us, and our happiness, from the sight of the envious meddling world, till such time as I shall be able to declare my marriage: my love shall cheer your solitude, and my constancy and gratitude reward you for what you relinquish on my account."

Maria blushed, and with a sweet confusion

sion tenderly embraced her lover.—" O, Charles!" said she, with affecting softness in her voice, " if I can only flatter myself with the hope of rendering you happy, I must be so myself, was I even to live in a desert;" and a tear rushed into her sparkling eye as she said—" But I never shall be able to support myself, if you ever repent the choice you have made."

How easily is a heart that loves prevailed on to believe what it wishes!—Woodmar's vows soon convinced Maria, and removed every shadow of doubt from her mind; and Mrs. Dempster felt herself too highly honoured by the thought of soon being able to call Count Woodmar nephew, to entertain the least doubt of the truth of his assertions. He had enjoined the strictest secresy, and desired her to accompany her niece into the country; and, disagreeable as the first injunction seemed to her, who would gladly have informed the whole town of

Maria's

Maria's good fortune, she was too much flattered by his second proposal not to agree unconditionally to whatever terms he proposed.

Woodmar went away as soon as he had lulled the one into the most delicious dream of love, and the other into that of ambition, and a firm reliance on his honour. When he returned home, and found himself only in the society of his own thoughts, his slumbering conscience awoke, and with severe twitches represented to him how villainous a part that was which he intended acting: but, black as his designs were, he soon found means to varnish them over, and excuse them.

"Does not happiness consist in imagination?" said he to himself; "and ought we not to rejoice, if an illusion, a dream, kindly affords us that bliss which reality would have eternally denied us? It is true that I intend to deceive Maria, but I only do so to insure her felicity. Her tender heart, which could not forget me, although

although I so highly offended her, would have broke, if she had remained in the dismal situation I found her in; and her charms, which only I know how to prize as they deserve, would have faded, if I had not come, and recalled them back to life. Besides, is it not in my power to prolong the illusion in which her happiness consists as long as I please? Do I not intend to secure to her and her children, in case she should survive me, or ever discover the invalidity of her marriage, a settlement that will enable her to live and maintain her family in a genteel and independent manner? But I shall certainly be able to conceal the true state of affairs from her for a considerable time, or, perhaps, as long as she lives; for who will dare to disobey my orders, and inform her of my marriage?—No," continued he, quite composedly, "she ought to be obliged to me for condescending to employ art to conquer her scruples,

scruples, without apparently wounding the virtue that she sets so high a value on. I no longer reproach myself—she will find her happiness in mine."

CHAP. XIII.

THE Count visited Maria every day, generally in disguise, or in the dusk of the evening, that he might escape the notice of the neighbours. She requested Woodmar to delay their marriage for some months, that her happiness might commence with the end of her mourning. The Count, who was passionately fond of the

the winter amusements that the town afforded, did not oppose so reasonable a desire, and, satisfied with having the attainment of his wishes in view, enjoyed those pleasures that were within his reach.

"Oh! if my dear father was still alive," would Maria sometimes say, when intoxicated with the prospect of future happiness that awaited her, she would wind herself out of the Count's encircling arms—"how would he rejoice to see his daughter virtuous and happy!—Sit down, Charles," continued she one day, "and I will tell you what he said just before he died. I knelt by his bedside, to receive his last blessing, and he, with his chilly hand, clasped hold of one of mine, and conjured me never to forget, nor deviate from, the virtuous principles he had endeavoured to instil into my mind. 'If you are ever so poor,' said he, 'you will not be unhappy, if you are mistress of a good conscience, and the knowledge of never having committed an action that

 you

you have reason to be ashamed of. Good behaviour and an upright mind reward themselves; and even if the world neglects or overlooks them, the inward peace that they afford the heart in times of sickness or affliction, richly rewards us for the forbearance that they require: for believe me, my dear child, the hour will come when all the glittering painted joys of life, and every thing that appear to us so highly desirable in it, will seem flat and tasteless to us; when we shall bitterly repent even our most trifling errors, and wish every precipitated action undone; for the dying eye sees the faults it has committed through a multiplying-glass, and the thought of retaliation strews thorns on the bed of sickness. How happy do I feel that I performed my duty as well as I was able; that I endeavoured to lead a good life myself, and that I did not stifle, but nurtured the seed of virtue in your bosom! Honour my memory, by following my precepts: close your ears against the

the syren song of vice, your eyes to the allurements of seduction, and only cherish good and virtuous sentiments in your mind.'

"My dear father," continued the weeping Maria, "how easy he died, after I promised to do every thing he desired! A few moments before his eyes were closed for ever, he fixed them on me, and, with a dying look and voice, faintly articulated—'But what will become of Edward?'—I could only answer him with sighs and tears. He understood the meaning of my silence, pressed my hand, and said, with a tenderness that I can never think of without being penetrated with the most grateful and poignant sorrow—'I will not persuade you, my dear child, nor even tell you what my wishes are, lest you, as they are my last, should regard them as commands, and as such think it your duty to fulfil them: But before you fix your choice, consider well if the object of it deserves to be preferred to Edward.'

 "His

"His voice faltered, and his sight grew dim, whilst he was speaking—he closed his eyes, lay still a few minutes, which he undoubtedly spent in prayer, then raised himself up, and looked wildly about him, then sunk back upon his pillow, and breathed his last. My senses almost forsook me, I fell upon the much-loved corpse, and wished myself in its place."

This artless relation violently agitated Woodmar's mind: he shuddered, and was seized with a chilliness that made his limbs tremble; but he was master of sufficient duplicity to conceal the real cause of his perturbation, by pretending a sorrow that rendered him still dearer to Maria.

"Such was the death of a good Christian, and an honest man," said Mrs. Dempster; "and if his was not quite free from uneasiness and terror, what must the last hours of the profligate wretch's be, whose life was a continued scene of wanton and premeditated wickedness! In the awful hour of death, the joyful sounds of mirth

and

and frolic, with which he used to stun his conscience, are no longer heard, and all his vices appear, stripped of their gaudy and superficial colouring, in their hideous shapes, to his affrighted eye. When, therefore, the blasphemer, the impostor, the seducer—and one often finds all those vices united in the same person, sees the dark prospect of that land from whose 'bourn no traveller ever returned,' lie open to his view, accompanied with the terrors of death, and the thought of the eternal punishment that crimes like his must expect to meet with there, overwhelm him with despair, and pierce his soul with a thousand daggers—oh, how gladly would he give whole years of the voluptuousness he rioted in, for the comfort that the recollection of a single good action would afford his inexpressible anguish! With every sigh he heaves, he will curse the past, every recollection that occurs to his terrified mind will be a fore-

taste of the punishments that await him, and——"

"O cease!" exclaimed Woodmar, hastily rising from the chair he sat on; and without seeming to know what he did, he threw himself upon another, on the other side of Maria, against whose face he concealed his, in which the agony of his mind was strongly painted—"for Heaven's sake, cease your horrid description! and let us rather in silence pity the unfortunate man whose death is so terrific!"

Maria tenderly embraced her lover, and her tears trickled down his cheeks as she said—"Let us live well, my dear Charles, and then our last hour will be as calm, and only a little more solemn than the preceding ones."

It was impossible for Woodmar to stay any longer without betraying himself; he, therefore, looked at his watch, pretended an engagement, and took a hasty leave of Maria. His conscience, which he had

lulled to sleep, with the pleasing hope of the happiness he should taste in her arms, awoke, and lashed him with scorpions' stings. He hurried home, where the crime he was going to commit, the torments that Mrs. Dempster asserted a betrayer of innocence would feel on his sick-bed, and a dark conjecture of a state of rewards and punishments after death, terrified his heated imagination, and made him determine to avoid the latter by resigning Maria.

But to resign Maria!—Maria, who appeared lovelier and lovelier to him every day! who loved, nay almost adored him! Maria, whose happiness depended on him, and whose tender heart would perhaps be infinitely more pained by renouncing him now, than by the discovery of the deceit he had practised (if she ever discovered it) hereafter!—and this in the flower of his age, and with the ardent desire he felt to possess her, merely because the ill-timed zeal of a methodistical old woman

had frightened him with a description of hell, which, if it really existed, was at a great distance. Besides, was not repentance in his power, when the approach of age and infirmities informed him it was time to amend his life?

This was the manner in which he sophisticated away his fears; and the torrent of amusements that he was continually engaged in, when he was not with Maria, at last washed away even the remembrance of them.

It was impossible for a mortal to be happier than Maria was: her present life resembled a clear pellucid stream, which glided gently along, and whose shining surface only reflected a serene heaven and perpetual sunshine. The winter fled away on rosy pinions, and she laid aside her mourning (not without tears of gratitude that were due to the memory of the deceased, but which were only the forerunners of those of joy). It was the latter end of March when the Count first saw Maria

Maria in colours: he immediately reminded her of the promise she had given him, Maria blushed, and he kissed the confirmation of it from her lips.

Preparations were made for their departure. Maria took the money that she had sold her father's house and effects for, which amounted to a considerable sum, with her, and packed up another, of equal value, that she found in his desk, for Edward, with a letter, in which she, notwithstanding the Count's inhibition, informed him of her future destination. She regarded her doing so a duty that she owed him herself, and even her father's ashes; besides, she was too fully persuaded of Edward's friendship and discretion, to apprehend any bad consequences from the confidence she placed in him.

She sat down and wrote the following letter with an aching heart, because she was certain its contents would greatly pain Edward's:—

"I deceived myself, Edward, when I thought I loved you; for the inclination I felt for you, which I supposed love, was merely friendship, which satisfied my inexperienced heart, as long as it was ignorant of a warmer sentiment: but now that I have found the man who alone is capable of inspiring me with that passion, accept my grateful thanks for the confidence you placed in me, by thinking it in my power to render you happy, accompanied with a prayer for forgiveness, that I am not able to do so. In a few days a sacred and indissoluble band will unite me to Count Woodmar, and nothing will be wanting to complete my felicity, when I know that you are easy and contented; and that I am convinced you will soon be, although the loss of me may pain you a little at first; for the goodness of your heart, and the many amiable qualities you possess,

possess, will soon win a heart more deserving of you than mine, if I had kept my promise; for I could only have offered you a divided one, which would not be worth your acceptance, as merit such as your's gives you an undoubted right to expect an entire one.

"But do not suppose that I was dazzled by the affluence and splendor that are appendages to the rank of my future husband; no!—it is love—the most ardent and irresistible love, that attaches me to himself; for it may be years before the many hindrances will be removed which at present oppose our union, and not till then shall I share the splendor with him that is so indifferent to myself, or publicly bear the name that will render me happy in private.

"I am, however, too fully persuaded of your generosity and prudence, my worthy friend, to think I risk any thing by entrusting you with the dearest secret of my heart, which will account to you for

my sudden disappearance, and prevent your making any enquiries after me.

"Accept the sum of money that you will receive with this, as a token of remembrance from me and my dear father, who saved it for us both; and when we meet again (perhaps in many years hence), I hope I shall find the same sincere friend in you as you have always proved yourself, as long as I can remember, to

"MARIA."

As soon as she had sealed up this letter, she fancied she had disengaged herself from every thing that prevented her devoting herself entirely to her dear Count. She went to the church-yard where her father was interred, to take leave of his grave: she had procured the first violets the season afforded, which she strewed upon the tufted hillock, as an offering to the dead; and she mingled, in the silent orisons

orisons that she addressed to Heaven for the repose of his soul, her thanks for the tender and paternal care he had taken of her. She felt so happy, and yet so depressed, that it was impossible for her to denominate the innumerable sensations that thronged themselves together in her mind. A dark foreboding of an approaching evil suddenly rushed into it, like a dark thunder-cloud, and made her shudder; but the sunshine of love soon dispersed it, and diminished her sadness.

CHAP.

CHAP. XIV.

THEY set off early the next morning. Maria did not feel the least regret at leaving the town in which she was born and bred, for, far from its walls, more pleasing bands awaited her than any she had yet borne. She found the Count waiting for her at the end of the first stage, and they then continued their journey together.

Happy days!—the remembrance of them, even long after they were passed, often heaved Maria's bosom, with a sigh that seemed to wish to recal them. To fly, in a manner, through the finest parts of

of her native country, by the side of the man she loved, and who was soon to be her husband; to find amusement and instruction in every object they passed by; then the temperance of the air, and the unclouded sky of the beginning of spring; the novelty and pleasure that travelling afforded her; the extreme delicacy of the Count's behaviour, who, to deceive his victim still more, was extremely on his guard; and, finally, the peculiar charm that the hope of soon being united to him for ever—dispersed over every thing she saw; and were not those sufficient reasons to fill a young and innocent mind with the highest degree of rapture?

They arrived, at the close of the third day, at a seat of the Count's, where they seemed to be expected. Woodmar led Maria into the old magnificent Gothic castle; and soon after their arrival, a worthless wretch, corrupted by the Count's gold, in the habit of a priest, performed the

the marriage ceremony with all due formality.

They only remained a few days at that place, for Woodmar did not think himself concealed enough there; but Maria did not leave a house that was become extremely dear to her, without regret, to go to that which was to be her future place of residence.

Nettlefield was about thirty miles from Woodmar Castle; but the farther they advanced on their journey, which was chiefly over barren heaths and stony, untilled ground, the lonelier the road became. The desert country grew flatter and flatter, and they at last perceived the only house the eye could trace in the wide, lonely, and sparingly-cultivated plain. Some wild chesnut-trees, not yet in leaf, threw the shade of their naked branches into the enclosed grounds that surrounded the house, and the social ivy twined itself over the grey stone walls that were half

covered

covered with moss.—They alighted, the bailiff received them at the gate, and opened the rooms that were prepared for their reception. Except himself and the menial servants that belonged to the house, there was not a human creature to be found within the circumference of several miles; for Nettlefield was a solitary estate, that had neither village or hamlet near, nor belonging to it. A neatly-papered and furnished sitting-room, with a handsome harpsichord, over which hung an exceeding well-executed full-length picture of the Count, was destined for Maria. She likewise found a little library in an adjoining closet, which promised sufficient entertainment for her lonely hours; and her bed-chamber was likewise newly fitted up; but the rest of the house was out of repair, and uncomfortable; and the whole of it, her apartments not excepted, extremely gloomy. If she went to her casement window, that was half covered with ivy, which darkened the

the room, the wide-extended plain, which was terminated by mountains partly covered with dark woods, was all she discovered; and no where a trace of cultivation or industry—no where an object on which her eye could rest with pleasure. But the country seemed a garden of Eden to Maria, in Charles's company; and she was too grateful for every proof of her husband's attention and love, to suffer the solitariness of the place to make a disagreeable impression on her.

Woodmar likewise spent the happiest days of his life, with his charming Maria, in this lonely spot: he who had always sought more than he found, and ever expected a greater degree of bliss than he tasted, now found the expectations he had formed far exceeded by Maria's unaffected tenderness, which was always new, and never cloying to him. His constant intercourse with her, uncontaminated by any other society, awakened better sensations in his mind than he had ever felt before;

before; and a thousand galling thoughts often made him shudder, when he considered how cruelly he had deceived her; and indeed all the kind efforts she made to disperse his sorrow, and amuse him, when she perceived his mind was ruffled, were hardly sufficient to do so, when his conscience reproached him for committing a crime of so black a dye as he was guilty of. Perhaps, if his hand had still been free, he might have rewarded her unbounded love and confidence with it: perhaps, if he had before known the full extent of her goodness, the full value of the angelic purity of her mind, which he now discovered by degrees, he might have gained the difficult conquest over himself, and not have robbed her of her innocence and peace of mind for ever. Maria would then have been happy with Edward; for mutual esteem, easy circumstances, and similarity of rank, would have rendered her so, even without her being passionately in love with him; and

the state would then have had a useful and industrious family of the middling rank more; but now—as it was impossible to recal the past, as the Count was united to Josephine by an indissoluble tie, and to Maria by the tenderest affection, he was determined to conceal her real situation from her knowledge, as long as it was in his power to do so, and to make her recluse life as happy as he could.

He spent some months with Maria, without feeling a wish for other pleasures than those that her company afforded him; nor had he ever entertained a thought, whilst he was engaged in the bustle and dissipation of fashionable life, that domestic comforts were so sweet as he found them. Maria's cheerfulness, her constant good-humour, the tender affection with which she studied and strove to anticipate his wishes, and the agreeable talents she had acquired and strove to perfectionate, afforded a pleasing variety to his enjoyments.

They

They sometimes walked hand in hand across the meadow, that afforded a scanty pasture for the few cows and sheep that grazed in it, through which a small rivulet gently flowed, which was almost concealed by the rows of willow trees that were planted along the sides of it; and although the prospect was extensive and void, they looked at each other, and fancied themselves in Paradise: or they sat, at noon, in the enclosure that was called the garden, absorbed in a pleasing silence, which often expresses the thoughts that occupy the mind more forcibly than it is in the power of words to do, and ate their frugal dinner there; the wind gently rustled through the broad shadowing leaves, and many a red and white blossom was blown down by its breath, to adorn their table: or they contemplated the beauty of the setting sun, how it sunk behind the distant hills, seemingly into an ocean of purple ether; and Woodmar prevented the roseate hue from reflecting it-

self

self on Maria's face, which the glow of health had tinged with a lovelier carmine than it was in its power to do: or when the shade of night obliged them to return to the house, Maria lured her friend, her lover, her husband, into her silent, peaceful apartment, with the silver and affecting sounds that she drew from her harpsichord, which she accompanied with her artless but melodious voice as soon as he came, and which, without the assistance of studied quivers, irresistiby touched the heart.

If the weather was dull, and did not permit them to go out, Maria opened her bookcase, and they alternately read to each other; or the Count instructed her in drawing, in which he was a proficient, and was not a little pleased at the advances his charming scholar made in that pleasing art. They sometimes invented patterns for embroidery, which Maria's needle enchased, with wonderful accuracy, on a ground of silk, whilst Woodmar read to her.

her. At other times they occupied themselves with more serious things, and sketched landscapes, monuments, or copied prints, of which the Count had brought a collection with him for that purpose; or Woodmar instructed her in French, and Maria comprehended every thing that a so much-loved master taught, with wonderful facility.

Thus the hours that they spent together flew too quickly away, and the melancholy one that was fixed for their separation advanced with hasty strides. Maria shed tears of unfeigned sorrow in the Count's arms, when she bid him adieu, and the parting oppressed his mind with a degree of anguish that he had never felt before; and he would willingly have given whole years of his existence to have freed himself from the stings of conscience, which increased and became more clamorous, whenever he received a fresh proof of Maria's affection.

 The

The habit he was in of being constantly with her, the meekness of her disposition, the sweetness of her temper, and her unaffected piety, which he had had opportunities of remarking on numberless occasions, his present plain and regular way of living, his being at a distance from the extravagancies of fashionable life, and the contagion of vicious example, and the good effects that the country air had on his health and spirits, had amended his morals, and made him more sensible of Maria's worth and his own demerits than he had ever been before. Unfeigned sorrow frequently wrinkled his brow and dimmed his eyes, and he forcibly felt the truth of an observation which he had never attended to before—that the deceived is always happier than the deceiver.

Woodmar at last tore himself from Maria's encircling arms, and left her. She followed him with her eyes as far as she could, and when he was out of sight, her

looks

looks rested for some time on the cloud of dust that his carriage wheels threw up, till that likewise vanished, and she then burst into a flood of tears. How empty and desolated every place seemed to her, now the Count was wanting!—how much she missed him everywhere where she was accustomed to see him, and how dismal did the walks now appear to her, which merely his company had before rendered charming! He had endeavoured to assuage her sorrow by a promise of writing to her often, but is it in the power of the most regular correspondence to make us amends for the loss of the company of those we love? could it make Maria amends for not seeing, not conversing with, not embracing Woodmar?

The first days after his departure Maria was a prey to the most gloomy dejection; but her mind was too meek to remain long in that state, and the hope of seeing him again soon lulled her mind into a gentle melancholy, which she fondly nourished.

 She

She supported, without a murmur, the solitary exile into which love had banished her, and found the means of enlivening and embellishing it. She wrote to Woodmar every day, and her letters breathed the genuine sentiments of her heart—the hope of his return, and the most implicit confidence.

She worked with great industry, for what she did was for him: she likewise continued her French and drawing with unwearied application; and in the evenings (hours that used to glide away so rapidly and gaily in his company) she frequently indulged herself in the sad luxury of tears, whilst she played the affecting song out of the opera of Nina, that Charles had taught her, and which was at present so applicable to herself—

"Quand le bien—aimé reviendra."

CHAP.

CHAP. XV.

THE Count pursued his journey with a mind deeply involved in thought, and often looked back, to catch a last glimpse of the place where he had enjoyed such perfect happiness. Nothing had ever happened to him, in the whole course of his life, that had affected him so violently as this separation; tears frequently started into his eyes, and his heart felt as oppressed as if it was going to burst.

"O, Maria!" said he to himself, "what would I at this moment give to render our marriage legitimate! and that

I durst as publicly avow you my wife, as my heart acknowledges you to be so in private, how willingly would I renounce the vain and glittering pleasures that formerly appeared of such consequence to me, to live entirely for you, and the domestic happiness that you have taught me the value of!"

He arrived at the country-seat where he had left Josephine, without meeting with any accident, and was received by her with great tenderness and joy. The melancholy that her unfortunate love had occasioned, had, as it found no nourishment, consumed itself in the retirement she lived in, and nothing remained of it except a gentle languor in her eye, and a scar, that the recollection of the past had left in her heart, that she still felt, but which was no longer painful. She was grown handsomer and more blooming than Woodmar had ever seen her before, and the expectation she had of soon being a mother, which she now first informed her husband

husband of, with a blush that increased her charms, twined the band of mutual esteem around them, which was strengthened by gratitude and tenderness.

Woodmar was become much steadier, gentler, and more uniform in his behaviour than he had formerly been, which brought him nearer to Josephine, who really began to love him; and the image of Augustus, instead of occupying the foremost place in her mind, daily removed backwarder and backwarder in it.

The remembrance of Maria deeply wounded the Count's heart, and much as he strove to do so, and well as Josephine deserved his attentions, it was impossible for him to assume even an appearance of tenderness for her. The thought of his not only having deceived Maria, but likewise having acted a base and ungenerous part towards his virtuous wife, stepped, like a malignant fiend, between him and every enjoyment. The expectation he had of being a father afforded him great

satisfaction, and inspired him with a kind of grateful veneration for Josephine; but her company was irksome to him, and became more so as soon as he perceived her attachment to him; for his heart reproached him with being unworthy of her love, and the impossibility of his ever returning it.

The Count was quite an altered man, for the former violent ebulitions of passion, which he did not give himself the trouble to check nor disguise, were now changed into a gentleness of behaviour, which is extremely pleasing to persons whose tempers are naturally hasty, and rendered him doubly interesting to Josephine, who knew his to be so. But his passion for Maria increased to an almost incredible height: his eyes would sometimes follow a passing cloud, and he would say to himself—" Perhaps that has hovered over the spot that she inhabits, and where she mourns my absence." And the certainty he felt that he, although distant, was the object

object that engrossed her time and thoughts, was the idea that afforded him the greatest satisfaction.

He passed the summer in a state of mind such as has just been described, with very little variation. The beginning of August the Countess was brought to bed of a son; the Count pressed the infant to his bosom, with a pleasure that was mingled with pain, as he thanked his wife for the valuable present she had made him. A faint colour overspread Josephine's cheeks; she tenderly pressed the Count to her bosom, as he stooped to embrace her, and said, in a feeble voice—" I give you more than this boy, my dear Woodmar, I present my heart to you with him, which, from this moment, is entirely your own! I do not deny that I reluctantly gave you my hand, and your principles, at the beginning of our marriage, were so very opposite to mine, and so disagreeable to me, that I confess I behaved colder to you than I ought to have done, or was

consistent with prudence or good manners. But at present, independent of this child, that we have an equal right to, I feel my heart irresistibly drawn towards you, and an attachment of the warmest and tenderest kind. You seem now to have discovered how preferable domestic comforts are to the frivolous amusements of the town; let us, therefore, if you are capable of renouncing them, resign them for the solid joys that a retired life can alone afford: or, if your cheerful mind sometimes wishes for a change of scene, enjoy those pleasures alone that I am ignorant of, and therefore cannot have any charm for me; and permit me to remain in the retirement I am accustomed to and love. The education of our son will pleasingly employ my time and thoughts; and when my beloved husband is absent, I will impatiently expect his return, and receive him with transport, and open arms, when he, weary of rambling about, wishes to return to them."

She

She gave one of her hands to the Count, as she pronounced the last words, with an affectionate smile, and with the other pressed her infant to her bosom; and her eyes were fixed, during the whole scene, on the handsome and deeply-affected Count, who sat upon her bedside and shed tears of shame and remorse. Her former indifference would have been a thousand times more agreeable to him than her present tenderness, which was a dagger to his heart, as that would have afforded him a seeming plea for the violent affection he felt for Maria, and, in some measure, excused his continuing his connexion with her.

"Yes, my dear Josephine," replied the Count, as soon as he was able to summon up resolution enough to speak—"you are in the right; the turbulent pleasures of the town can have no charm for him who has tasted the comforts of domestic happiness in its full extent. I no longer sigh for the tasteless follies and

imaginary joys that formerly had such charms for me, and which I pursued with so much avidity. To make myself worthy of you shall, in future, be my chief endeavour; and if I, alas! am not at present quite deserving of the love and goodness you have just expressed, forgive, and have patience with me; overlook my failings with your accustomed mildness and indulgence; and be assured that my conscience punishes me more severely, for every action I commit that my heart condemns, than it would be in the power of my bitterest enemy to do."

He raised his handkerchief to his eyes as he pronounced those words, and hastily left the room, to the no small astonishment of Josephine. She had long remarked a kind of depression of spirits in him, which, although it was more agreeable to her than the frolicsome giddy levity of his former behaviour, made her apprehend that a secret sorrow preyed upon his mind; but as he did not seem inclined to

reveal

reveal it to her, she did not venture to enquire the cause of it. Alas! she was very far from guessing the real one!

Josephine soon regained her lost strength, and her maternal cares, which were as new as pleasing to her, hastened her recovery. She now thought of Augustus with a sensation that was no longer dangerous to her peace of mind, for it was of the tranquil kind, with which we reflect on the companion of our early youth, from whom Fate has long separated us; and although it is impossible for a feeling mind to think of an absent friend without regret, it is one that time and reason has robbed of its bitterness. She had promised to write to him as soon as she had acquired her present frame of mind, and this was the time she fixed on to perform her promise, which she did in the following terms:—

"The

"The almost irresistible impulse that urges me towards you, and forces me to my writing-table, to converse with you, is no longer the effect of love; and I therefore own it without a blush. Another sentiment, not less sacred, has now taken its place; for my heart now contains the image of my husband, as well as my friend, and they both dwell in pleasing concord in it. I hope, Wilmot, you will not accuse me of fickleness, when I own to you that the man who severed the bands of my first love is now become the object of my second. He is the father of my child; and the power that thought contains would have attached me to him, even if he had been less amiable than he really is. I entered into the marriage state with great reluctance, and I believe it was partly owing to the very small expectation I formed of

Providence's

Providence's having any happiness in store for me, that by degrees made me perceive the many good qualities my husband possessed, and the comforts I might enjoy if I would. I therefore endeavoured to stifle every wish that was opposite to duty, and a higher Power restored my long-lost peace of mind to me.

"I am a mother! I pressed my dear infant, who bears your name, to my beating heart; and, with streaming eyes, vowed to love him and his father to the latest hour of my life. Nothing now interrupts my conjugal happiness, except the fear of your still loving me too well for your own repose. Ah! how I should rejoice, if I was certain that the sentiment you feel for me does not exceed the bounds of calm and steady friendship! My heart has carefully hoarded up the pleasing recollections of the past; but they now appear to me like a dream, of which no trace remains except a transient shadow, which I regard with a moistened but cheerful

eye,

eye, which I wish to return, but am able to see it glide past me without being discomposed.

"Tell me if your sentiments are of a similar nature? Has time, absence, and new objects, healed the wound that love inflicted? Am I dear to your heart, without being any longer dangerous to it? If that is the case, oh come and once more give me your hand, that we may renew the band of friendship which our minds and lips once formed, and which I hope will last till another and a better world receives our united souls."

Nothing could equal the politeness and attention of Woodmar's behaviour to Josephine; he strove to anticipate her wishes, and her will was a law to him. The esteem he felt for her increased the more he became acquainted with the beauties of her mind, and the depth of her under-

understanding; and as he sought her company more than ever, she fancied his attachment to her was as sincere as that she felt for him. But Maria was too dangerous a rival, and every effort of Josephine's was insufficient to make the Count amends for the loss of her society. Her lovely picture was too deeply engraven on the tablets of his mind, and whichever way he turned his eyes, he missed the captivating charm that true love disperses over every object that surrounds it.

CHAP. XVI.

THE beginning of September the Count began to make preparations to go to another country-seat, and Josephine begged that he would permit her to accompany him. The request was made in such earnest and affectionate terms, that it was not in his power to refuse it, although he would much rather have gone alone, as the principal motive of his journey was to pay Maria a visit. Four tedious months were elapsed since he saw her last, and his heart bounded towards the spot that she inhabited. He determined to leave the

the Countess at Woodmar Castle (the seat where he had deceived Maria by a pretended marriage), and to ride to Nettlefield as often as he could frame an excuse for doing so.

The evening was far advanced when they approached Woodmar Castle, and the silver beams of the full moon bespangled the fields and meadows. The Count was seized with an ardent wish to see Maria, which increased the nearer he drew towards the spot that she inhabited. He leaned his burning cheek against his wife's face, assured her of his love, and clad the turbulent desires that were directed to Maria in words that he addressed to his wife.

Women are often duped by men in this manner, who frequently declare to one what they really feel for another. Josephine was delighted with his assurances of love and constancy, and returned them with all the warmth of sincere affection.

The

The next day Woodmar said to Josephine, by way of preparation—"I have another small estate in this part of the country, which I love and sometimes visit, although its situation is dull and disagreeable. It is about thirty miles from here, in a flat uncultivated country, and I would willingly ask you to accompany me to it, if the house, which is old, and out of repair, was in a condition to lodge more than one person; but I am certain you would be exposed to a thousand inconveniencies, which would greatly distress me. I will, however, ride over, as I wish to see the old keeper, who was formerly my father's footman, and attended me when I was a child. The poor old fellow is always rejoiced to see me, and I own I am glad to see him."

The Countess, who did not suspect her husband's veracity, did not make the least objection to his going, and Woodmar hasted to his beloved Maria on the wings of

of love. He found her sitting at her harpsichord: she had finished playing, and one of her hands only, now and then, gently touched the keys, whilst her eyes were fixed, with the tenderest expression of expectation, on the picture of her adored Charles, that hung over it. A single candle sparingly lighted the room; but she had placed it in such a manner that its faint gleams illumined Woodmar's features, and left all the rest of the room in duskiness. He had opened the door softly, and gently stepped across the room towards her; but finding that he was the object that so entirely engrossed her thoughts, he was unable to contain himself any longer, and, with the joyful acclamation of—" Dearest, best beloved Maria!" he clasped her to his palpitating heart.

Surprise and joy deprived Maria of the power of utterance for some time; but she soon recovered, and exclaimed, as she returned his embrace—" Charles!—

my

my dear Woodmar!" They then remained silent for some moments, lost in the transport of seeing each other again, which fettered their tongues.

They spent two happy days together, and then Woodmar was obliged to leave her again. "But why so soon?" said Maria, mournfully.

"I must," was his reply: "my father is at Woodmar Castle, and my being absent for a longer time might raise his suspicions."

Maria implicitly believed what he said, and they parted with the expectation of soon seeing each other again, and remaining longer together.

Nothing occupied his thoughts as he rode slowly back, but how he should contrive to spend a week or two with Maria, without creating any distrust in Josephine; and the genius of love at last whispered a scheme in his ear which promised to be successful. A day or two after his return he told the Countess, with apparent con-

cern,

cern, that he should be obliged to leave her for a short time, as a letter he had just received informed him that some business in town made his presence absolutely necessary there; that he should return by the way of Nettlefield; but that she might depend on seeing him again either the nineteenth or twentieth of October, that they might celebrate their wedding-day together.

Josephine thanked him for this mark of his attention, which was indeed highly flattering to her.

He went and took the road that led to town till he was out of sight, and then mounting his horse that was in waiting, sent the empty carriage on, and flew to Nettlefield. He really had some business in town, but it was of no great consequence, and he determined to settle it after his visit to Maria.

She received the idol of her heart with as much love as she had parted from him; and the hours they spent together flew, as

if

if wafted on the downy pinions of smiling angels, rapidly away. The Count, who had hitherto loved with the inconstancy of the butterfly, and flirted from one object to another, in search of the variety he was so fond of, felt the chains with which Maria had fettered his heart rivetted still more closely about it, every time he saw her; for he daily discovered fresh beauties in her mind as well as in her person; and her behaviour, without losing its natural simplicity, was more polished and engaging than when he first became acquainted with her.

When the time arrived that the Count had fixed for going to town, and which it was not in his power to delay any longer, he felt a peculiar kind of foreboding of an approaching evil, and nothing could exceed the agitation he was in when he took leave of Maria. He felt as if she was violently forced from his arms, when he gave her the embrace that was intended for the last, and as if he should

never see her again. He again pressed her to his bosom; and a tear, the most agonizing one he had ever shed in his life, dropped from his eye, and mingled with those that rolled down her cheek.

"Maria," said he, "I will come to you again before I return to Woodmar Castle, and I will willingly take this road, although it is a good deal about, to have the pleasure of spending a day with you."

A ray of pleasure sparkled in Maria's eyes, and she fixed them on Woodmar with expressive tenderness, to thank him for his kind promise, which enabled her to bear his departure with more composure than she would otherwise have done.

Josephine, in the mean while, found the large magnificent Castle extremely lonely, and impatiently wished for the Count's return.

"How far is Nettlefield from here?" said she to the steward, one day.

"Not quite thirty miles," was his reply.

"It is a pity," continued Josephine, "that the house is so small and out of repair; for, if it was not, I believe I should not be able to deny myself the pleasure of meeting the Count unexpectedly, who, without doubt, would be agreeably surprised at finding me there."

"I believe the house is not so small as your Ladyship imagines," replied the talkative Mrs. Clements, who hated Woodmar Castle, on account of its dullness, and fancied every other place must be preferable to it: "besides," continued she, "I have been told that my Lord had two or three rooms fitted up in it, some time ago, and sent every thing from town that was necessary to accommodate a family; and I dare say this gentleman," pointing to the steward, "will tell your Ladyship the same."

The steward had long suspected that his Lord had some private reasons for staying so long at Nettlefield in the spring; for

for Woodmar, who had no great opinion of his discretion, had framed an excuse for sending him away on business the few days that he spent with Maria there; and he had procured the promise of secresy of the other servants with threats and bribes. But as secrets of that nature are seldom strictly kept, he had, by some means or other, got some intimation of the affair, and, provoked at his young master's want of confidence, which his old Lord had never let him feel, he thought this a good opportunity of letting him perceive that he would have done well to have trusted him; particularly as his supposed ignorance of Nettlefield's being the scene of his private pleasures, screened him from blame, let the consequences be what they would. He, therefore, readily replied, that he was certain the Countess would be able to lodge there for a few days very commodiously—"And oh!" continued he, rubbing his hands with an hypocritical smile,

 "how

"how delighted my Lord will be to find your Ladyship so unexpectedly there, and that you prefer his company to the ease and splendor that surrounds you here!"

Josephine fondly nourished that thought, and represented to herself, in such lively colours, how agreeably her husband would be surprised at finding her at Nettlefield, that it was not in her power to resist the temptation of going there.

"It will be a fresh proof of my love," said she to herself, "when he finds that I did not let his description of Nettlefield deter me from going to it, that I might have the pleasure of seeing him a day sooner; and if I do not find all the conveniencies I am accustomed to there, I can easily make shift for a few days: besides, how little does a mind want that is blessed with a good and amiable husband, or a mother, when she sees her darling smile."

Little Augustus (a charming child, who became dearer to his mother, and resembled

bled his father more and more every day), his nurse, and Mrs. Clements, were the only persons that the Countess took with her to Nettlefield. She set out early in the morning of the eighteenth of October, and as the dullness and sterility of the country she passed through, made it nearly resemble a desert, she, whose eye was accustomed to more smiling and fruitful prospects, felt an uncommon depression of spirits, which increased the further she advanced, as did the unfruitfulness of the country. Neither a tree, bush, nor village, or the least sign of cultivation, was to be seen, whichever way she turned her eye, except in the stony road about six miles from Nettlefield, that was unfrequented except by waggoners, who sometimes drove their team along it: she perceived a solitary pine, whose dismal lot she could not help lamenting. Unfortunate Josephine! do not waste thy pity on a senseless tree, that bloomed fresh and

 healthy,

healthy, although it had taken root in a desert spot; reserve it to bewail thy own fate, which will be cruelly decided in a few hours!

CHAP. XVII.

It was a fine mild afternoon when Josephine alighted at the gate of Nettlefield Lodge. Maria sat at work under the chesnut-tree in the court; she jumped up as soon as she heard the unusual rattling of a carriage, and, supposing it to be Woodmar, who was come a day sooner than he had promised to do, she ran to the grass-plat before the door, to receive and wel-

come him. But how greatly was she surprised to see a young and beautiful female step out of the coach, followed by persons who seemed to be her attendants, and a lovely infant, fast asleep, in the arms of one of them!

The lady approached her, and Maria, too much confused to know what she did, retreated a few paces back, and could by no means explain the mystery to herself.

Nor could Josephine conceal the surprise she felt at finding a girl of such uncommon beauty, and so fashionably dressed, in such a remote place. Maria had on a fine white muslin gown, which was so exceedingly well made that it shewed the elegance of her shape to advantage; a straw bonnet, tied under her chin with a pale pink satin ribbon, which partly concealed her unpowdered silky tresses; a late autumnal rose, perhaps the only one that art had been able to produce in that savage spot, was pinned to her breast, and her wedding ring on her finger, which at

last inspired her with courage to approach the lovely stranger.

Josephine was gentle and kind to every body, but her husband's frequent excursions to Nettlefield, which she recollected at that moment, and the interesting appearance of the young person, who she supposed to be the keeper's daughter, excited a jealous pang in her bosom, and she looked at Maria with more pride and disdain than became her.

Maria approached her in a modest manner, but without forgetting the dignity that she fancied due to her new situation, and enquired what chance had brought her to Nettlefield, as the appearance of strangers was somewhat uncommon there?

Josephine replied, tartly, that as she was in her own house, and come to meet her husband, her coming there could not be attributed to chance. "But be so good, child," continued she, "to shew me a room."

Maria's

Maria's cheeks began to glow, for she was somewhat offended at the Countess's haughty manner of speaking.

"In your own house, Madam!" said she. "I thought this house belonged to Count Woodmar."

"You are quite in the right," returned Josephine; "and as I am married to him, I should suppose that I have as much right to be here as you have, although you, my dear, seem to be of a different opinion. I therefore, once more, desire that you will shew me a room, for I am tired, and not disposed to stand here any longer."

Maria concluded that the strange lady was a relation of the Count's, who had fabricated this story to give herself more weight.

"My room," said she, rather peevishly, "is at your service, although I am fully persuaded that you are not Count Charles Woodmar's wife; and I dare say it will surprise him as much as it does me,

M 5 when

when he hears you assert, in such positive terms, that you are married to him."

"What!" exclaimed the Countess, "is he already arrived?"

"No," returned Maria; "but I expect him to-morrow."

"You expect him!" replied Josephine, tauntingly—"that is strange, indeed!—Pray who are you, Miss, that you ha e a right to expect him? Are you the keeper's daughter, or the housekeeper? or are you otherwise connected with the Count? —or, perhaps, you are the magnet that so often draws him to Nettlefield?—and, indeed, your arbitrary manner almost inclines me to believe that the latter is the case."

Maria was excessively provoked at this behaviour, nor could she patiently support the contemptible opinion the Countess entertained of her.

"I know very well who I am," was her answer; "and if Count Woodmar was here,

here, you would probably not insult me in the manner you do! I have no occasion to blush at what I am, but, perhaps, you will be obliged to do so, when you are better acquainted with me, and perceive how little I deserve this treatment!"

These spirited words, which she pronounced with all the pride of innocence, silenced the Countess. She followed Maria into her room, and as soon as she perceived her husband's picture, the flame of jealousy blazed with redoubled violence in her bosom; but she strove to conceal her feelings, and said to Maria, in a gentler voice than before—"If my behaviour to you has been otherwise than you deserve, I ask your pardon; but your's to me was certainly not such as it ought to have been. I think I have a right to expect attention and civility from those persons who live under my roof: but you spoke with a boldness and arrogance, as if you had been mistress of the house yourself. Pray tell me who you

 are,

are, that we may no longer misunderstand each other."

Maria contended with herself if she should own her marriage or not. Woodmar had charged her not to do so, on any account; and her reason approved the arguments he made use of: but as she was positive that he would own his marriage the next day to the lady, she could not deny herself the little triumph of punishing her pride, and making her blush in her turn.

"If I treated you in a manner, such as becomes the mistress of this house," said Maria, "I did not, by doing so, wish to appear more than I really am. A private marriage," continued she, pointing to Woodmar's picture, "has given me a rightful claim to this man, who you persist in asserting is your husband. The lowness of my birth, which I am not ashamed to own, prevents my Lord from publicly owning his marriage, as long as his ambitious father lives, who would

endeavour to dissolve it; but although I only bear his name in private, I am not ignorant of what is due to it. To-morrow you will hear the confirmation of what I have just told you from himself, and pardon my behaviour, which would indeed have been inexcusable, had I been my Lord's housekeeper."

The Countess grew paler and paler whilst Maria was speaking; and when she stopped, she was so entirely overpowered by the anguish of her mind, that she was unable to support herself any longer, and sunk almost lifeless into the chair that stood nearest to her. Maria's still happy ignorance attributed the violent agitation of her mind to shame and humiliation; and with tender care endeavoured to recover her. Her efforts had the desired effect; the Countess opened her eyes, and bursting into a flood of tears, gently exclaimed, with a look of pity, as she took hold of Maria's hand—" Poor unfortunate deluded creature!"

Maria, who supposed she was not rightly in her senses, replied, with the gentleness that those generally assume who are obliged to contradict the opinion of a sick person—"I am neither deluded nor unfortunate. See here," continued she, drawing off her wedding-ring, and holding it to the Countess, "the pledge of his constant and lawful love!"

Josephine took it with a trembling hand, and repeated, in a voice more painfully affected than before—"Unhappy creature!"—and she continued, as she pointed to her's and the Count's portrait, which hung on a gold chain upon her bosom—"A vile seducer has deceived you with false hopes, and abused the confidence you placed in his honour. I am Woodmar's wife. Our marriage was not secret, but sanctioned by his and my family. I came here with the intention of causing him an agreeable surprise, and have found you, and—the never-ending misery of my future life!"

She

She covered her face with both her hands, and Maria stood as if she was petrified. At that moment Mrs. Clements came into the room, and brought Augustus to his mother. Josephine sprang up. "Look here," said she, as she folded the smiling infant to her heart; "and if you still entertain a doubt, see the betrayer's features stamped on this innocent face!"

Maria turned as pale as death; her knees tottered, and she, with difficulty, staggered to the sofa, and threw herself upon it.

Mrs. Dempster was called, the whole house was in confusion, the Countess was so ill that she was obliged to be put to bed, and Maria lay a whole hour upon the sofa, just as she fell upon it, without moving. Her eyes were wide open, but the relief that tears would have afforded, was denied her—they were immoveably fixed on the same spot, nor was she able to articulate a single word.

Josephine

Josephine told Mrs. Dempster the dreadful story of her niece's misfortunes, and nothing but the repetition of the tale of woe would have been able to have roused Maria from the state of insensibility she was in. Her eyes rolled with all the wildness of desperation, and the perturbation of her mind resembled the raging billows of the sea in a storm. The treachery of the man she had adored now appeared quite plain to her, and filled her heart with aversion and contempt; but at the same time a thousand daggers pierced that heart, in which his name was written in indelible characters by the hand of love; for nothing can equal the anguish of being forced to despise those we loved.

Maria tottered to the Countess's bedside. What Mrs. Dempster had told her of that unfortunate girl's story, had inspired Josephine with the highest esteem for her virtue, and most heartfelt pity for her misfortunes.

"I am

"I am not guilty," said she, in a low and broken voice—"oh, do not judge of my mind by the severity of my fate! Truth seemed to dwell on his lips, and my doating heart too easily believed what it wished to be true!"

Josephine tenderly embraced her; they wept together, and tears were a great relief to Maria's bursting heart.

"But what do you intend to do?" said Mrs. Dempster, as soon as she saw that her niece had acquired some degree of composure.

"Never see him again!" replied Maria, in a firm and angry manner. "I will go as far as my feet will carry me! I shall find some corner in the world where I shall be able to conceal myself and my unmerited shame. Father!—Oh my dear father in heaven!" exclaimed she, with streaming and uplifted eyes and clasped hands, "I did not thoughtlessly forget the lessons of virtue you gave me on your death-bed; they were deeply engraven on the tablets of

of my heart, but a villain won my love by dissimulation, and my confidence in his honour dragged me into ruin. But my crime was unintentional, and I am certain the Almighty will pardon it."

"No, you must not leave me," said Josephine. "Remain with me, Maria; be my friend, my sister, and the companion of my misfortunes in my future dismal and solitary life."

"Oh, Madam!" cried Maria, "I feel the extreme generosity of your mind, and am grateful for the delicacy of your behaviour to me; but if there is a possibility of my ever recovering that peace of mind which your cruel husband has robbed me of, it can only take place when I am far removed from every object that can remind me of him. Let me fly from this place before night comes on; for to-morrow—alas! to-morrow he bid me expect his return! and I am not able to support the sight of him!"

CHAP.

CHAP. XVIII.

"BUT where will you go to," said the Countess—"a stranger, and, perhaps, without money, in this uninhabited and dreary country, that is unknown to you. No, you must consent to remain here till I have found an asylum for you and your aunt, and settled an annuity on you for life, sufficient to enable you to live in an eligible manner."

"How, most amiable of women," replied Maria, "can you wish me to remain in a house where every thing I see reminds me of the gilded hopes with which I entered it, and the delight with which

which I looked forward to futurity?—to see the man again who has deprived me of innocence and peace of mind!—to be, perhaps, indebted for support to the hand that has involved me in such inexpressible misery!—No! suffer me to depart. I have a considerable sum of money that is my own, which, with the labour of my hands, will enable me to maintain myself and my aunt; and the abhorrence that I at present feel for Count Woodmar will enable me to support all the inconveniencies and difficulties that I may meet with on my flight."

Maria retired into another room, and summoned up all her resolution to remain firm and unshaken in her purpose. The evening was far advanced, and the autumnal air was cold and damp; but how little effect have external objects on a mind that feels the necessity of tearing itself from the objects it loved, to obey the injunctions of virtue and—desperation!

She

She opened a drawer that contained the Count's letters, and left them (without opening one of them again), directed to the Countess, as a justification of her conduct, and the imaginary hopes she had entertained. The valuable presents with which the Count's generosity had loaded her, she ordered to be returned to him again, and she thus tore herself, with a bleeding heart, from every thing that was formerly dear to her.

"But," said Mrs. Dempster, when she saw the preparations her niece was making for her immediate departure, "why are you in such a hurry, Maria? The Count has acted infamously, by deceiving you with a sham marriage; and I think the least punishment his crime deserves, is to oblige him to provide for us both in a genteel manner. Don't be obstinate, but remain here, at least for some time. I approve of your resolution of not living with him again, for that would be a sin; but to run, at hap-hazard, about the world,

world, to avoid seeing him, is silly, and what he is not worth: besides, I am too old and infirm to follow you; therefore let us remain here, and rely on the Countess for our future maintenance."

Mrs. Dempster was a good sort of woman, and, like Maria, was better instructed than persons of her condition generally are; but she did not possess her niece's refined sensibility, nor did she feel that there is nothing so dreadful to a delicate mind as the idea of receiving favours from the hand it despises.

"Well, then," replied Maria, in a cold and contemptible manner, "do you remain here, and live in affluence on the pension that the Count will, without doubt, settle on you. I will go alone, for I prefer an honourable poverty to all the riches of a man who I despise and hate!"

Mrs. Dempster endeavoured to pacify her, and Maria sat still, and seemingly brooding over the resolution she was forming,

ing, although she was far from doing so, as she had previously unalterably determined it in her own mind.

She at last got rid of Mrs. Dempster's company, by pretending weariness, and a desire to go to bed; and as soon as she was alone, she put the money she had brought with her into her pocket, tied up some linen in a handkerchief, and softly and unperceived stole down the back stairs, and out of the house.

When at a little distance from it, she turned round and looked up at the dimly-lighted window of her dear and never-to-be-forgotten apartment: a faint gleam of light stole through the leaves of the dark ivy that clung round it with unalterable attachment, and tremblingly glimmered on the cold and rimy ground. It was impossible for her to help thinking on the many happy hours she had passed within its walls, with her then beloved Woodmar, and the pleasure that remembrance afforded, suspended her present anguish

for

for a moment, to awake in the next with augmented violence. Tears started into her eyes, but she hastily turned round again, and said to herself—" Away—away from this place !" Then, recollecting the whole extent of her misery, she clasped her hands, and exclaimed—" O that I had lost my senses with my happiness !"

She walked on without fear, as she knew that neither river nor ditch interrupted the sameness of the flat and open plain ; the night was cold, but clear ; and the innumerable stars that twinkled in the wide-expanded horizon that her eye could trace, lessened the darkness of it. She walked on several hours over the stony common, without knowing in what part of it she was, and had, by degrees, lost sight of the gleam of light that issued from the windows of Nettlefield Lodge. She at last perceived a very rugged road, which she turned into, as she hoped it would lead her to the abode of human beings.

She had only proceeded a few steps when her strength forsook her, and she with difficulty, crawled to the solitary pine that she perceived, by the faint light of the stars. She sat herself down under it, and fancied the weakness and faintness she felt were the tokens of approaching death; and ah! how welcome was the thought of death to her, who had survived every joy and comfort that life had to offer! Her ideas were dark and confused; she thought her last hour was come, for an inexpressible weariness oppressed and closed her eyelids, and she sank—not into the arms of death, but into a profound sleep, that a good deal resembled it.

It remained unbroken, till she was roused from it by an ungentle shake: she slowly opened her heavy eyelids, and perceived a brown sun-burnt countryman, with an open honest countenance, standing near her. He held a long whip

in his left hand, and with his right he was endeavouring to rouse her from a sleep which appeared dangerous to him. It was, moreover, broad day-light, and the sun shone bright and warm in the clear azure sky.

"Where am I?" said Maria, in a hoarse voice, for the sharpness of the air, and dampness of the night, had given her a cold.

"In the open road, young woman," replied the man, with a look of pity and astonishment. "Where do you intend going to, alone as you are?"

"Where am I going to?" replied Maria, recollecting herself, and bursting into tears—"alas! I have no longer a home to go to!"

The man shook his head, and said, in a friendly manner, as he helped her to rise, "Come, get up; you must know where you are going to."

But Maria, who felt a numbness and pain

pain in all her limbs, was unable to stand, and, overpowered by weakness, sunk down upon the ground again.

"Come, pluck up your spirits, and leave off crying," continued the man: "God Almighty never forsakes those who put their trust in him. Do not despair; for, if you really have no home, you may easily find one; and, if you put your trust in God, and are honest and industrious, I warrant you will never come to shame."

The firm voice, and the integrity that the countenance of him who pronounced those words expressed, affected Maria. She looked up, and perceived a tilted cart and one horse standing at a little distance, which she supposed belonged to her unknown friend.

"Worthy man," said she, endeavouring to dry her streaming eyes, "I am not so poor, that want distresses me in this manner. I have as much money as is necessary for my support, if I was only easier here," pointing to her heart.

 "I will

"I will not enquire into the cause of your sorrow," returned the honest carrier; "every body knows best where the shoe pinches; but I think that such a young creature as you are cannot have met with many misfortunes in the world yet. But, let what will have happened to you, upon my soul you cannot remain here! I am going home, my cart is empty, and if you have a mind to get into it, I will take you as far as you chuse to go with me, for nothing.—There," continued he, taking a piece of brown bread and a small flask of brandy out of his pocket, and giving them to Maria, "eat, and drink a mouthful; and when you are a little refreshed, if you have a mind to go with me, we will set off."

Maria gratefully accepted the well-meaning carrier's offer, and, with his assistance, got into the cart, which was tolerably easy. He tossed up all the hay there was in it, upon which he desired her to sit, or lay herself down, which-

ever

ever she liked best. The man smacked his whip, and the cart rolled gently along with her.

She was not able to devote her attention entirely to the melancholy thoughts that her unhappy fate suggested; for her guide was in a talkative humour, and endeavoured to amuse her, as he walked along by the side of the cart, by sometimes singing a song, and at others by giving her an account of himself and his family.

"God has been very good to me," said he, "for, ten years ago, I was a poor fellow, and earned my scanty morsel of bread by hard service. My master was the owner of a large farm, and used to send his corn to distant markets; as he knew me to be honest and careful of the cattle, he commonly sent me with the team, and I was always lucky enough to give him satisfaction. Betty, the dairy-maid, was a lively, well-looking lass, and I soon perceived that she always seemed

 better

better pleased when I came back than when I went away, for which reason I concluded that she did not hate me, nor did I dislike her, for she had sparkling black eyes, rosy cheeks, and was a clever nimble girl. But I said to myself—'Conrad, do nothing in haste, that thou may'st not have reason to repent at leisure; those are not all the qualifications that are necessary in a wife.' I therefore did not mention my love to her, but secretly watched her behaviour, and enquired of others what character she bore. I then perceived myself, and heard from others, that she was a sober, honest, and good-tempered girl, and that she was civil to every body, and minded her own affairs, without troubling her head with other people's. I then said to her—'Betty, will you marry me?' She coloured up to the ears, held her apron up to her eyes, and said—'Yes.' So far all was well; but what were we to live on? Betty had nothing except a pair of sturdy arms and an

an honest heart; nor had I, till then, ever thought of saving any part of my wages; for although I was neither a gambler nor a drunkard, I loved a dance, and never failed going where a fiddle was to be heard, nor to the public-house on Sunday afternoons, where I never was behindhand with my companions. But now I entirely turned over a new leaf, for I staid at home, and hoarded up every penny of money towards settling myself in future; Betty did the same, and in a few years we had saved enough to buy a little cottage, with a small garden, that was to be sold in our village, and which, as it was in a ruinous state, I got cheap. I spent all my leisure hours in repairing and putting them in order; and then I married Betty, and have in her a good and industrious wife. We worked at day-labour at first, and Betty spun in the evenings; by doing so, we earned more than we wanted for our maintenance, for we were able to lay a little aside: our store encreased by

 degrees,

degrees, and I was at last able to buy a horse and cart of my own; and I often carried corn to town for my old master, for love and money, who continued my friend, and had more confidence in me than in any body else. I have now saved so much that I am able to say, the oats my horse eats grows in my own field, and that I buy the corn I take to town, and sell it on my own account. Besides, I am healthy and cheerful; and when I return home, my heart jumps for joy, when I see my own good woman, and my four healthy children. I then rest myself, look after my affairs at home, enjoy a comfortable day or two, and then drive away again.—You don't know, young woman," continued he, "what a happy life I lead; I need thank nobody for what I have, but my own industry and God Almighty, who never forsook me, and that makes a light heart and a contented and grateful mind."

Maria listened to what the honest carrier said without interrupting him; but the

the plain and artless description of his household happiness gave her heart many a severe pang.

"He remained in the sphere that Providence placed him in," sighed she, "without attempting to soar above it. Ah! why did I suffer love to tempt me to forget mine?"

CHAP. XIX.

MARIA travelled some days in this vehicle, and it was indifferent to her into which corner of the world it would bring her. The whole unravelling of her fate seemed to her like a frightful vision, but she vainly looked forward to the time in which she should awake. To live far removed from the world and its fallacious joys, was the only hope she entertained; and it was happy for her that her fancy represented her misfortunes to her in such vague and uncertain forms, and often left her, for hours together, in the supposition

tion of having dreamed, or she would probably have sunk under the pressure of her woes; but so she accustomed herself by degrees to fix her eyes on the ruins of her shipwrecked bliss, and to regard, with a composure that nothing but conscious innocence could bestow, the fleeting shade of her past happiness, and to think of him who she had loved so well with a contempt that equalled her former affection—not as if the effort to forget him had proved an easy one—oh no! True love, particularly a first love, erects an altar to its idol in the sanctuary of its heart, that the hand of time, even if it is assisted by the most sovereign contempt, is, with difficulty, able to overthrow. But when Maria was going to swallow large draughts of that, of all poisons the most dangerous to lovers, an enthusiastic and pleasing remembrance of her former happiness, the recollection of the baseness of his conduct, and how cruelly he had abused the confidence she placed in

 him,

him, mingled with the recollection of the past, and presented him to her mind's eye, stripped of all the dazzling qualities and charms with which her imagination had adorned the most perfidious of his sex, and shewed his vices in their natural hideous colours. She learned to despise him, and that, in a virtuous and delicate female mind, is the first step towards oblivion. The tender bands of mutual confidence soon dissolve, when they are no longer cemented by mutual esteem, and die away with it.

The fourth morning of their journey, as Conrad walked tranquilly along the road, by the side of his cart, and whistled the tune of a morning hymn, he joyfully raised his eyes and hand, and exclaimed, in a transport—"There, there!" as he pointed to a chain of misty bluish mountains at a distance—"there my wife and children live!"

The pleasing prospect he had of soon seeing and embracing them again made him

him silent, and enabled Maria to deliberate, undisturbed, on her future plan of life. She had agreed with the humane and good-natured countryman to lodge and board at his cottage for a moderate sum, which his wife was to fix, and to employ her time in whatever manner she chose; but the profound melancholy that was caused by her misfortunes was so much in need of a sympathetic friend to whom she could communicate her sorrows, and, by doing so, relieve herself of some part of the burden that so grievously oppressed her mind—she was likewise so much accustomed to the society of persons whose capacities were adapted to her own, that she now, for the first time, regretted not having taken more pains to combat her aunt's objections, which, had she done, she would probably have prevailed on her to have been the companion of her flight; besides, the idea of her remaining at Nettlefield, and, in a manner, living on the Count's charity, was insupportable to

her. She often thought of him with a peculiar mixture of half-stifled love and anger; she represented to herself how shocked he would be when he returned to Nettlefield, and found she had left it; the sorrow he would feel at losing her; and the remorse his crime would occasion. At such times, her heart was, alas! too much inclined to represent him in the least culpable light, and to suggest many reasons that might serve to mitigate his fault. Her eyes, that swam in tears, would, at such times, look back on the happy days that were past; nor could she always entirely stifle the secret wish (which, however, always made her cheeks glow with shame) that the veil which had concealed the dissimulation of his heart from her knowledge, had not been removed; or (she owned this to herself with a less degree of shame) that she might, at least in time, find him deserving of her friendship.

But all her efforts were vain; her hopes were annihilated, and, with them, her peace of mind entirely lost. The only comfort she had was in the consciousness of having acted right, and that alone enabled her to support her misfortunes with some degree of composure.

Josephine, in the mean while, was not happier than Maria: she had done every thing that love and duty required; and by the sacrifice of her first love, which she had brought her husband, by her yielding to her parents' will, and afterwards by the sincere attachment she felt for him, she fancied she had acquired a right to his fidelity. It was, therefore, impossible for any thing to have inflicted a deeper wound than the inconstancy of the man she loved, and who was united to her by the most indissoluble ties. Every hope of happiness in the marriage state was now irrecoverably lost for ever.

How often did she lament that the unhappy thought of surprising her husband

at Nettlefield had ever entered her head, for without that she would at least have enjoyed the fancied bliss of thinking his attentions sincere, and herself the object of his love!—without that, Maria, who she extremely pitied, would likewise have been happy!

The Countess was almost distracted, when she was told in the morning that Maria was missing, and that, although the strictest search had been made after her, she was no where to be found: she was afraid, although she did not venture to communicate her apprehensions to Mrs. Dempster, that the poor despairing creature had committed a rash action, to free herself from the anguish that tortured her mind; and her terrified imagination, which at that time represented every object to her in the most frightful light, conjured up a thousand hideous phantoms to torment her.

The Count arrived at the time he had promised Maria to be at Nettlefield; he

hastily

hastily sprung out of his carriage, and ran up stairs with a palpitating heart. He met Mrs. Dempster at the top of them, and enquired where Maria was? but she turned from him with a look expressive of the abhorrence she felt, without deigning to answer him.

Woodmar, highly surprised at a behaviour he was so little accustomed to, or, as he thought, had a right to expect, opened the door of Maria's room, which appeared dismal and forsaken to him.

"Maria!" said he—"where are you?"

At that moment Mrs. Clements stepped out of the bed-chamber, which was contiguous to it, and his blood chilled in his veins.

"How the devil came you here?" exclaimed he, with a look which, if it had had the power of the basilisks, she would instantaneously have dropped down dead at his feet. She related the whole affair to him in as few words as possible.

The

The Count's temper was naturally exceedingly violent, and, already irritated by Mrs. Dempster's mysterious silence, it is no wonder that what Mrs. Clements told him raised his passion to the highest pitch. He, in his opinion, was at that moment infinitely less culpable than his wife, who he regarded as the envious destroyer of all his joys. The idea of having lost Maria, and to be at present the object of her abhorrence, as much as he formerly was of her love, almost drove him to madness. The old ranger, the servants, and even poor Pallas, who scented about every corner of the house to find Maria, and seemed to share his loss with him, felt the effects of his rage. He sent every one different ways, and went himself in search of the dear object of his [illegible]; but every one agreeing in their account, when they returned, that not a trace of her was to be found, heightened his anguish, and drove him

almost

almost to desperation.—He at last prevailed on himself to go to the Countess, who was so ill that she was not able to leave her bed.

"I do not pretend, Madam," said he, in an austere voice, "that I have acted right, but it is in my power to alledge many excuses for my actions. Maria had inspired me with the most violent passion for her before I knew you; but her virtue baffled all the arts I made use of to triumph over it. Wearied by my fruitless endeavours, I formed the resolution to forget her, for the thought of deceiving her in the manner I afterwards did, had not, at that time, entered my thoughts, and I left town with the determination of fulfilling the wish of our parents; and although it was not in my power to offer you my heart with my hand, to do all in my power to render you happy.—O, Josephine," continued he, lowering his voice, which, by degrees, became broken and tremulous, "had you shewed less pride,

pride, and more warmth, you might then have fixed my heart, which sighed for a return of love, although Maria was the object of its desire. Your attentions and kindness, had they been attended with the least appearance of fondness, would have conquered my wild licentious passion, have reformed my libertine principles, and have made me a good and happy man. But you let me too plainly perceive the pain that your obedience to your parents cost you, and that every favour you granted me was with a bleeding and reluctant heart. Your indifference, that increased to dislike, which I must have been blind not to have perceived, and the abhorrence my morals inspired you with, which you openly declared, instead of striving to amend them with patience, and gently guiding my straying feet from the paths of error into those of rectitude, offended my pride, and was not calculated to satisfy the demands of a heart that had once been loved by Maria.

I was

I was obliged to esteem, but it was not in my power to love you. The idea of my amiable Maria kindled anew in my mind, and my impatient desire to see her returned with augmented violence, particularly as the sight of you continually wounded my vanity, and robbed me of self-esteem.

"The latter had hitherto protected Maria's virtue and my honour: I blushed at myself as often as I thought of getting possession of Maria by unlawful means; and my fancying myself better than I was, prevented my sinking entirely. But now that no longer existed, and the pride of your unblemished virtue let me so often bitterly feel how very inferior I was to you. I then ventured to devise schemes, that I formerly, even in the midst of my excesses, should have shuddered at. I saw Maria again, and gained her by the promise of a private marriage. It was performed, and I learned of that amiable, gentle, and noble-minded creature, in the

happy

happy hours I passed with her, which were only embittered by the consciousness of the fraud I had practised to get her into my power, the surprising effect of good example, and that few minds are so entirely vitiated as not to be corrected when they have a pattern of unassuming virtue continually before them.

"I again felt the dignity of my nature, as well as how I ought to have acted, and sincerely repented the crime I had committed, and wished it undone, in spite of the happiness I enjoyed in Maria's arms. That I had violated the duty I owed you, and deserved your contempt, for the commission of a deed which, although you was ignorant of it, I could not help despising myself for, increased my sorrow. But Maria was happy in her illusion, and I swore to myself to continue it, as long as I could, as I knew her tranquillity entirely depended on it.

"This was the state of mind I was in when I returned to you; and how greatly did

did I find you altered! for where I expected to be treated with chilling formality and indifference, I was met, half-way, by mildness and affection; and the mutual satisfaction that the hope of our, then unborn, child afforded us, increased my esteem, and inspired me with the warmest interest for you. But, alas! I had no longer a heart to bestow, for it entirely belonged to Maria, who had gained it by a thousand amiable qualities that I had earlier discovered in her than in you, and who, although distant, was ever present to my mind, and engaged as it might seem with other objects, was always occupied with her.

"You, unfortunately, by some means or other, discovered the secret of my love, and ungenerously made use of my absence to destroy a felicity which would have been perfect, if it had not been frequently interrupted by the stings of conscience. You have succeeded but too well in your intention—Maria is lost to me

me for ever! sorrow, or despair, have perhaps already broken her heart, or—O God! O God!——But do not triumph too soon," continued he, with augmented violence; "I know I am culpable, but who was the cause of my being so? I can find sufficient excuses for my behaviour to you, and punishment enough in the hell that rages in my bosom, whenever I reflect on my poor deceived and ever-adored Maria.—Farewell, Madam!—live as happy as you please, but far from him who will ever, in future, regard you as a stranger. I will endeavour to bear my cruel fate with as much fortitude as I can. Maria shall be the deity to whom my repentant tears shall be addressed.—Take care of my son, and pity his father, who you have rendered more miserable by your unfortunate curiosity and jealousy, than you perhaps intended doing. Farewell for ever!"

Woodmar hastily left the Countess's room, as he pronounced the last words; and,

and, bursting into tears, as he embraced his little boy, who Mrs. Clements carried to him, in hopes of appeasing him, left the scene of his former joys.

CHAP. XX.

JOSEPHINE was incapable of interrupting her husband's cutting speech by a single word: she was far from thinking that their first meeting would have been of this kind, and that he would load her with reproaches, which she thought she alone had a right to make him. Her heart exculpated her from his accusations; she was convinced that nothing but the sincerest

sincerest affection was the cause of her journey to Nettlefield; the pain that his suspicion, as well as confession that he never loved her, caused, was more acute than that which she had felt before; and if the discovery of his inconstancy had at first shattered her delicate nerves, how much more did the unmerited harshness of his behaviour, at parting, make her wounded heart bleed afresh! Her illness increased—a doctor was sent for from town, who doubted of her recovery. Nothing was heard of Woodmar.

However, Josephine's youth and good constitution, aided by the skill of her physician, at length subdued the violence of her malady; but her recovery was very slow. Her extreme affection for her child was all that still fettered her to a world in which, young as she was, she had suffered so much. But the more fully she was persuaded that her separation from her husband would prove an eternal one, the more violent her attachment to her son

became,

became, who she regarded as a fatherless orphan, and, for that reason, had a right to claim a double portion of her maternal love.

Mrs. Dempster was her constant companion, and Maria, whose fate the Countess thought harder than her own, was the principal subject of their conversation.—"But Augustus is mine," would she frequently say to herself, when the peculiar cruelty of her condition appeared to her in the most gloomy colours, and futurity seemed to have no joys in store, to make her amends for the past and present. "I have Augustus, who will occupy my thoughts, and afford a compensation to my heart—but poor Maria! what can reward her for the annihilation of an illusion that rendered her so happy?"

It was impossible for Woodmar to give himself more pains to discover where Maria was concealed, than the Countess did. The jealousy and dislike she had once felt was entirely effaced from her mind,

mind, and the only wish she now entertained was to be able to render her hard lot as comfortable as possible. But every enquiry proved vain, and Mrs. Dempster often bitterly lamented and shed tears of deep-felt sorrow, on account of the uncertainty she was in of her niece's fate.

Maria, in the meanwhile, was safely arrived in the peaceful village where Conrad lived. It was situated in a woody country that was romantic and beautiful, and lay in a valley that was skirted round by verdant mountains.

The carrier stopped at a neat little cottage, and the rattling of the cart brought the whole family, who were at dinner, to the gate, who welcomed him home with loud acclamations of joy. Elizabeth fixed her eyes on the strange guest that her husband had brought home with him, in a curious but good-humoured manner; and Conrad related to her, with great prolixity, how and where he had found her,

and

and that it was her intention to live with them for the future.

"You are heartily welcome to do so!" said the honest creature, and a friendly shake of the hand accompanied those words. The children shoved their stools closer together, and set one for their father, and another for their new housemate, and were as familiar as if they had known her for years.

What pleased Maria best in these uncorrupted children of nature, was the simplicity of their manners, their unaffected piety, their industry, the humanity with which they shared what they earned by their labour, with their poorer neighbours, and their attention to herself, as well as the delicacy with which they respected her sorrow, without prying into the cause of it; for although Elizabeth was not entirely free from the curiosity which is, perhaps not unjustly, attributed to most of Eve's daughters, and would gladly have known what could make so young

and handsome a creature so low-spirited as Maria was? why her eyes were so often filled with tears, without having any seeming reason to be unhappy? where she came from?—and, in short, the particulars of her story. But she feared, with a delicacy that even persons of higher rank seldom feel for the unfortunate, to pain her by asking questions; and therefore patiently waited till such time as she should be inclined to unbosom herself to her.

That moment soon arrived, for Maria could not help discovering in Elizabeth's looks how sincerely she was interested in her fate, and how much she wished to know what it was, informed her of every thing that had happened to her; and her affecting story, which bore the stamp of truth, drew the tribute of sympathy and grief from Elizabeth's eyes.—"But," said she, kindly taking hold of Maria's hand, as soon as she had finished her relation, whilst the tears ran down her

sun-

sun-burnt cheeks, "is the man worth your fretting yourself, and pining away the best years of your life about him, as you do? Who knows if he is not, at the moment you are crying and wringing your hands, contriving some new trick of wickedness, and trying to ruin another poor girl—for I hear the great gentlemen are very wicked!—Comfort yourself with a good conscience, that frees you from the blame of intending to do wrong, and lead a sober honest life for the future, and then your mind will grow easy by degrees.

"But, Maria, you must not remain as you are; you must marry, have a home of your own, and lead a happy life. A clear afternoon often follows a dull morning, and sun-shine disperses the clouds that were gathered in the sky. Yes, yes, a stormy day has often the finest evening. Pluck up your spirits, and trust in God; he will find a good husband for you, even if he is not a Count, and then I warrant

you will forget your troubles, and be a happy wife."

"Alas! my dear Elizabeth," replied Maria, bursting into a fresh flood of tears, "the thought of him will be an everlasting antidote against all his sex to me!"

"Oh! I don't talk of to-day nor to-morrow," said Elizabeth: "nothing is everlasting in this world; why, therefore, should your grief be so? Let it rage on, and when the storm is over, I warrant your mind will be calm again; and when that happens, remember that one must not always brood over old sorrows, but strive to forget them, and be cheerful; and not despise the sparrow we can catch with our hand, because we once saw a canary-bird sitting upon the top of the house. I have a man in my eye, who, if I am not mistaken, will suit you to a T. It is the new ranger, who lives at the top of St. Lawrence's Hill, whose good behaviour, during the short time he has been

been here, has already made him beloved by young and old. I am sure you will like each other, as soon as you are acquainted together; and I will take care that you shall soon be so, when I think it a proper time. He called here once or twice, to speak to Conrad, who carried corn to town for him, and he played, and seemed as much pleased with the children as if they had been his own. Little Mary was his favourite; he hugged and kissed her, and gave her some money, and promised to bring her some sugar-plums when he came again; and, by his manner of looking at her, and sighing when he went away, I am sure he thought—' I wish I had such a pretty little girl of my own!'"

Although Elizabeth's project was highly disagreeable to Maria, yet she could not help thanking the good woman in her heart for her kind intention, which, as she had hinted her not intending to put it into practice immediately, she did not

think it necessary to oppose with any degree of violence at that time. It is true, her present situation was not quite what she wished it to be, but she had not the remotest idea of changing it, particularly by marriage. Her love to Woodmar, which was so closely interwoven with her existence, had been so violently severed and annihilated, that it was impossible for her not to feel a melancholy void in her mind; but it was still too firmly and warmly attached to the opinion of a first and only love, to be able to fill up that void with a second attachment.

CHAP. XXI.

MARIA endeavoured to dissipate the sadness and inactivity which had succeeded her former cheerfulness, by industry and benevolence; and her attempt was so far successful, that her violent sorrow changed into that gentle melancholy which is the never-failing attendant of unfortunate love. She forcibly suppressed the recollection of those times in which she had indulged herself in the dream of perfect bliss, and combated, with all the strength she was mistress of, against the painful-pleasing ideas which continually strove to rush into her mind.

The spirit of her father seemed to hover over and assist her, for when a gentle sigh sometimes flew after her departed joys, the thought of that dear parent immediately changed her half-extinguished love into the just abhorrence that Woodmar's unjustifiable conduct merited.

The sum of money she was mistress of relieved her mind from pecuniary cares; but she was accustomed to an active life, and knew that employment was the best weapon she could make use of to conquer her dejection: she, therefore, worked incessantly, and endeavoured to render herself as useful to those she lived with as her limited power would admit. Conrad and Elizabeth blessed the hour that she entered their house, for she taught, and bred up their children with the most attentive tenderness and care.

She instructed the girls in female employments, and the boys in reading and writing. Her lessons were adapted to their understandings, plain and easy; and

she endeavoured, with the greatest care, to preserve the native simplicity, and at the same time to enlighten their minds, as much as she thought their future destination required. The children loved her as well as they did their parents, and strove to express their gratitude and affection by every means their uncorrupted hearts could devise.

Maria's mind began to recover some degree of serenity; she was sincerely attached to the family she was with, and the idea of being useful to them afforded her as much pleasure as she, in her present forlorn state, was capable of enjoying. The expectation of a better life, on yon side of the grave, and the hope, which amounted to a certainty, that the involuntary fault she had committed would be forgiven, mitigated her sorrow, and often suddenly brightened up her mind, as a sun-beam sometimes does the sky, when it is covered with black thunder clouds: but they at the same time awakened in her

mind an ardent and longing desire for that future and better life; and the world presented itself to her view like a valley that is darkened by autumnal mists. Fate had only strewed roses in those paths of life that she had already passed, but their bloom and fragrance was faded and gone, and nothing remained of them except their thorns.

Elizabeth consulted with her husband how they should contrive to bring about an acquaintance between Maria and the young ranger; for the happiness they enjoyed in the marriage state, made it impossible for them to believe that such a dismal life as Maria led could have any charms for her, who had been so cruelly deceived, and had suffered so much.

Conrad was entirely of her opinion; but the matter was attended with more difficulty than they at first apprehended, for the young man lived extremely retired, or, to speak more properly, solitary, in his romantic abode on St. Lawrence's Hill;

nor

nor did he seem to entertain the least thought of marriage; neither did he seem to be of a very sociable disposition, for he avoided all manner of intercourse, and was seldom seen, except by those who accidentally met him, when he strayed about the woods with his dog and his gun.

Conrad had in vain thrown himself in his way several times, and invited him to call at his cottage; but he alledged business as an excuse, and refused to comply with his request as civilly as he could.

When the autumn and winter were over, and the spring ripened the first strawberries, Elizabeth and her children went into the wood to gather some. The first plateful was presented to Maria, and the rest were put into a pottle, and little Mary was sent with them to the ranger; for Elizabeth, remembering the particular affection he had formerly expressed for that child, thought it probable that the sight of her might renew his remembrance of them, and tempt him to call at their house. But

that scheme proved as fruitless as the rest; for he pressed the child to his bosom with warmth, gave her some things to play with, and some bread and butter; told her to come and see him as often as she would herself, but to be sure not to bring any body with her, and—there was an end of it. And as no persuasions were able to prevail on Maria to take the least step towards seeking the ranger's acquaintance, and he seemed as unwilling to cultivate her's as she did his, Conrad and Elizabeth thought it best to leave this, as they had often done other things that they had much at heart, to God and chance.

Maria was no longer the lovely blooming creature she was in her happy days; she was not grown much thinner, but sorrow had faded her cheeks, and robbed her expressive sparkling eyes of their lustre. The pleasing smile that had formerly charmed every beholder's heart no longer sat enthroned on her lips; but the

mild

mild and resigned sorrow that was stamped on all her features, had not disturbed the harmony of them, and gave them an affecting softness, which was perhaps more interesting than if they had been animated by the freshness of health, the vivacity of youth, and the serenity of a contented mind, which her countenance had formerly expressed. Her afflictions had given her as much as they had taken from her; at least the calm composure that appeared in her whole being replaced the cheerfulness that one missed in her; and the patient and noble manner in which she supported her misfortunes, and endeavoured to conceal them from the observation of others, excited the warmest compassion in every mind that was not dead to the feelings of humanity. She resembled a lily that perishes in a barren soil, and which, even whilst dying, diffuses its odoriferous scent around it.

The fineness of the weather tempted her into the open air, one summer evening,

ing. She had resumed her former plain apparel, and, with her imaginary elevation, had laid aside every thing that seemed annexed to it. She wandered through the pleasant corn-fields without taking the least notice of them, for her fancy replaced her in the cheerful days of youth, and painted to her, in bright and pleasing colours, the tranquil happiness she had enjoyed in her father's house, and the pleasure that the performance of her duty to that best of parents had given her. Edward likewise occurred to her mind, in that hour of calm reflection, and the thought of having rendered him unhappy embittered the pleasing train of recollections.

She walked along the side of the wood, with a mind that was entirely occupied with him, and every proof of esteem and love that he had formerly given her struck a fresh and painful thorn into her bosom. She had not received the least account of him since her father's death, nor did she wish

wish for any, as the knowledge of the uneasiness he suffered on her account could only augment her woe.

"Alas!" said she, bursting into tears, "who knows if he does not think of the unhappy creature who deceived him with false hopes, with indignation and hatred? But I am sure he would not deny me his pity, if he knew how cruelly Fate has punished me for listening to the syren voice of Love. Could he be cruel enough to deprive the unhappy wretch, who is robbed of every joy, the consolation that his compassion and forgiveness would afford her? Ah! may he be happy—infinitely happier than I am! and may a thought of me never trouble his repose, nor enter his mind, except in those hours when he may be inclined to forgive the trouble and vexation I caused him!"

She seated herself under a tall majestic oak, as she pronounced those words, and sank into a deep and melancholy reverie, from which she was awakened by a soft

and

and tremulous voice, which exclaimed, in broken accents—" Maria! my heart is inclined to forgive you! it has long forgiven you. I never was angry with you, but with your seducer."

Maria jumped up, exceedingly terrified, and wiped away the tears which dimmed her eyes, and prevented her seeing the person who spoke so mild and gently to her. It was Edward, as pale as herself, and, like her, consumed by the anguish of hopeless love, that preyed upon his mind!

Maria stood opposite to him, speechless and immoveable; but her sorrow was more eloquent than her lips.

" Maria," continued Edward, " do not apprehend any reproaches from me, for the paleness of your cheeks, and the redness of your sunken eyes, inform me that you are unhappy, and that thought would disarm the most violent hatred, had I ever felt it for you. If it is in my power to contribute any thing towards

rendering

rendering your situation more eligible, I beg you will command the services of your first and ever sincere friend—and—" his tears, which he could no longer restrain, prevented his proceeding. He clasped Maria to his bosom, and embraced her in a kind of convulsive agony, whilst her mind was alternately tortured and soothed, by the anguish of recollection, and the balm that friendship offered.

Maria was too much affected by the foregoing scene, to be able to enter into a conversation; she faintly desired to go home, and Edward conducted her through the fruitful fields to the village she lived in. A comfortable-looking tiled roof peeped through a clump of trees at the top of St. Lawrence's Hill, on which the last rays of the sun, which was already set, glittered.

"I live there, Maria," said Edward, pointing to it. "There you occupied my thoughts in the retirement I lived in, and there I often mourned your loss, without knowing

knowing that you was so near me. Oh how often has the uncertainty of your fate tortured my heart! and when I at last discovered where you was, and the situation you was in, I could not prevail on myself to destroy an illusion that seemingly rendered you so happy."

Maria, overwhelmed with shame and confusion, gently pressed his hand.

"And to find you here so unexpectedly," continued he, "and so pale and languishing—oh, Maria! you could not employ a more touching eloquence to move my heart in your favour, than the traces of deep-felt sorrow that I see in your face! But I conjure you to strive to banish it: your mind is pure—and may the thought of your being deceived, but not seduced, afford you the consolation it ought to do!"

Maria's agitation was so violent, that she was utterly incapable of making any reply; she repeatedly pressed his hand, and sometimes sighed her thanks for his unmerited

rited goodness to her. They at last arrived at Conrad's peaceful cottage.

"Ah, Edward!" said Maria, when she perceived his intention of leaving her, "surprise and inward reproaches have lamed my tongue; but be assured I feel your goodness, and the delicacy of your conduct."

He once more pressed her hand to his honest heart, and then hastily left her.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXII.

MARIA threw herself upon her bed as soon as she entered her chamber, and let her tears flow unrestrained as long as they would.

"Alas!" said she, wringing her hands in the agony of despair, "I have not only involved myself in an abyss of misery, I have likewise robbed that honest and most noble-minded of men of his expected happiness—and how easily could I, by merely practising a little self-denial, have made him contented and easy! O had I but strove to conquer my foolish, presumptuous

sumptuous love, and given him the hand with which he promised himself so much happiness! his unsuspicious mind would have supposed that my heart was incapable of feeling a violent passion, and a cheerful performance of duty on my side would have satisfied him; and the management of my family and household concerns would have usefully employed my time, and soon have tarnished the gay and gaudy colours in which my heated fancy always painted Woodmar; they would have faded and died away by degrees, and the victory over myself would have comforted my dear father on his death-bed—and I could have purchased all these blessings, had I had resolution enough to have voluntarily relinquished a love that I was afterwards compelled to resign, which was tore out of my heart with such violence, that it dragged away every gleam of hope and comfort with it, and occasioned a wound that can never—never be healed."

The mild beams of the moon illumined her chamber by degrees, but a midnight darkness, and uninterrupted sadness, continued to reign in her mind with undiminished anguish.

"But suppose," said she, continuing her soliloquy, "he should be inclined to obliterate the undeserved stigma that the past has cast on my reputation, by permitting me to bear his name, can I—ought I to accept the offer? Can flowers of happiness spring up for him on the shattered rémains that is left of me? No, no," continued she, bursting into a fresh flood of tears, "no, Edward, you deserve a wife whose eye is able to meet your's, and who has no occasion to let it sink abashed on the ground when she thinks of former times."

She passed a sleepless night, tortured by pains that she herself created, and in the morning Elizabeth found her feverish, and really ill, with red and swollen eyes, which bore the marks of restlessness and tears.—

Maria

Maria informed the good woman of her former engagement, and relationship to Edward, the young ranger, who she had accidentally met in the wood, the expectation she entertained of his renewing his offer of marriage, and her determination of refusing his hand, should he do so.

Elizabeth found this resolution unreasonable and imprudent; "for," said she, "if any body commits a fault, and repents it afterwards, and wishes it undone, is it not our duty to forgive them? and how much more so her who failed unintentionally, and yet repents, as sincerely as you do? No!—no, Miss Maria; consent, if your cousin asks you, and do not fret any longer about what is not in your power to alter. Even if you had consented to live in a dishonourable manner with the Count, your sorrow and good behaviour afterwards would make one wink at it; and I should, even in that case, think your husband a happy man! Besides, consider that you owe your old sweetheart some recompence

 for

for all the trouble and vexation you caused him; and that it is a great comfort, when we are old, and see all our friends go before us, to have a good husband to assist us in pain and sickness, and dutiful children, to close our dying eyes."

Elizabeth would probably have enforced her argument with many more reasons, if she had not been interrupted by Edward's coming to pay a morning visit to Maria. She now fancied her presence unnecessary, and therefore left the room with a significant wink and smile, and the full persuasion that his words would have more effect on Maria than her's.

Edward was extremely shocked when the flush that the surprise of seeing him had called to Maria's cheeks, fled from them, at the appearance of bodily and mental sufferings, that were visible in her person, and which he had not so much remarked in the twilight of the preceding evening; for she had then seemed to him infinitely less wan and emaciated than she did now.

At

At the heavy eye that was raised to him, and the pale lips that endeavoured to force a smile—"Maria! my dear Maria, you are ill," exclaimed Edward, who was extremely afflicted at seeing her in such a suffering state, who had so lately charmed his eye in the full bloom of youth and beauty.

"I am, Edward," replied Maria, in a low and trembling voice, "but my disorder is in my heart, and therefore incurable: it is oppressed with a heavy load, which resembles the weight of a tombstone, nor will it ever feel easy till it is covered with a real one."

Edward could no longer command his eyes. "O, Maria!" said he, "cannot my sincere and unalterable affection administer some relief to the sorrow that bends you to the earth? Can you deny the man who your dear father thought worthy of you, the pleasing care of contributing, as much as lies in his power, towards your happiness? I do not re-

quire your love, for that I know belongs to your betrayer, although you may endeavour to conceal its doing so, even from yourself. All I require is your friendship, and a right to render you as happy as I can."

Maria turned as pale as death, and sunk, almost lifeless, into his arms.

"No, Edward," said she, hastily, after a pause, in which she recovered strength enough to speak—"no, I no longer love him! I despise him too much to do so! But how can you think of uniting your fate with mine?—you, who deserve the affection of the best, the most virtuous of maidens. No! let me weep alone—weep at my folly, lament my lost peace of mind, and then die!"

"Then die in my arms," exclaimed Edward—and that awful moment cemented the bands of friendship and love between them. Maria promised to be his.

As soon as the first flurry of their spirits was a little abated, Edward related to her

what

what had happened to him since their separation. Lulled by the smiling hope of the felicity that Heaven had in store for him, he set off, with his Prince, tolerably composed; but his serenity soon fled from him, and was succeeded by the most violent depression of spirits, which increased with the distance that removed him still further from the object of his love. His Prince perceived the trouble his mind laboured under, and enquired the reason of it.

Edward frankly owned that it was caused by his being separated from the girl he loved, and that he should never be easy till she was his wife.

The Prince listened to him with attentive sympathy, but did not make him any reply. One morning, about ten months after they had left L——, his master sent for him into his room, and gave him a paper that contained his appointment to the ranger's place he at present held, which he had secretly procured for him

 from

from his father, with these words—"There, go and be happy!" Tears started into his eyes as he added—"And when you are so with your young wife, think of me, and pity the hard fate of him who dares not entertain a hope of ever being so!"

The Prince was violently attached to a young lady, who was greatly his inferior in birth, and the reason of this journey was, that he might be removed to a distance from her, who his father regarded as a very dangerous person. Edward always mentioned the patience and resignation with which the Prince bore his irremediable sufferings, in terms of the highest admiration and respect.

He hastened back on the wings of joy and hope, and pleased himself with thinking of the agreeable surprise that his unexpected return would occasion Maria and her father; and how sincerely they would partake of his happiness. But the house was empty, his uncle buried, and Maria

Maria vanished, without any body being able to inform him what was become of her.

Her letter was delivered to him some days after his arrival, which explained every thing that had seemed enigmatical to him. Edward, perceiving the violent agitation that Maria was in, at this part of his narrative, stopped, and she had great difficulty to prevail on him to proceed, which, by her express desire, he, however, reluctantly consented to do, and the conclusion of his story was as follows:

He left town, which was insupportable to him, as soon as he had divided the sum of money that Maria left for him between his poor relations, and removed to St. Lawrence's Hill, with a gloomy, mysanthropic mind. But before he removed for good and all, to the dreary solitude in which he intended to end his life, he endeavoured to gain some information of Count Woodmar. The result of his enquiries were, that he had lately married a young

young, beautiful, rich, and accomplished lady of quality, who resided entirely in the country, as she preferred solitude to the bustle of the town, which had no charms for her.

This account opened his eyes, and his rival's villainy appeared quite clear to him; for he was well acquainted with the solidity of Maria's principles and inflexible virtue, and convinced that he could not have conquered them by any other means than a pretended marriage. His rage and desperation sometimes made him form the project of stripping off the deceiver's mask, and informing Maria of his baseness; but a re-perusal of her letter always made him change his purpose, and he said to himself—"Why should I destroy the deception in which she feels herself so happy? Alas! my love would afford her no recompence for the pleasure I should disturb, by awakening her from her blissful dream!"

Edward

Edward withdrew himself from all intercourse with the world as much as he possibly could, and never left his rural hermitage but when his occupation obliged him to do so. Maria was ever present to his mind, and he incessantly lamented his loss and her unhappy fate.

Maria likewise informed him of the particulars of her life, which were nearly such as he imagined them to be. She related to him, in a true and impartial manner, the beginning of her acquaintance with Woodmar, their love, marriage, and the detection of his perfidy. The mention of circumstances that caused such a train of heart-harrowing recollections, affected her in a violent manner, which Edward no sooner perceived, than he desired her to leave off.

"Say no more about it, my dear Maria," said he, in a tender and delicate manner; "avert your eyes from the dismal days that are past, and direct your looks towards a happier futurity. I am con-

convinced, without your agonizing confession, that a mind so pure as your's was incapable of deviating from the paths of rectitude."

The perturbation of Maria's spirits was too great to allow her to speak, but a grateful tear, more eloquent than words, and an expressive look, thanked him for his confidence and affection.

Edward remained with her the whole day, and Elizabeth was almost beside herself for joy that her scheme was accomplished so much sooner than she expected. In the evening Edward prevailed on his beloved Maria to take a walk with him, and he led her to the oak, under whose spreading branches he had found her the evening before. He walked in silent rapture by her side. Maria was likewise silent, and, laying hold of his arm, she pensively walked over the greensward that she had trod alone the preceding evening. The glowing red of the setting sun tinged even the eastern clouds with a crimson hue,

hue, the bells chimed melodiously through the mild evening air that surrounded her, and seemed to her, in that tranquil moment, to be the echo of her youth, in which she, with a similar prospect in view, used to walk, hand in hand, with her cousin Edward, with the only difference, that she was then in better health, and cheerfuller than now. But the cruel recollection of what had happened in the sad interval of their separation, dashed the cup of joy from her lips, and made her shudder.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXIII.

AFTER the expiration of some weeks, in which pain and pleasure continually varied in Maria's mind, Edward reminded her of the promise she had given him to be his, and gently insisted on her fulfilling it.

Maria consented to the marriage with a heavy heart, not on account of her entertaining the least doubt of Edward's delicacy and generosity—no; she had received too many convincing proofs of both, to be under the least apprehension on that account; but the void in her mind, which daily increased, too plainly proved

proved that nothing but death could heal the wound her heart had received. That which had formerly, in the dazzling rosy light of love, appeared excusable to her, now seemed an unpardonable crime, and, as such, she regarded her inconstancy to Edward, and the precipitation with which she, in the infatuation of passion, had robbed him of the reward that was due to his fidelity and love, and bestowed it on a man who was so very undeserving of it, to purchase an imaginary happiness for herself.

But Edward was resolved not to live without her, and she at length determined to yield to his wishes. The marriage was solemnized in the church, in the presence of the whole congregation; and Conrad, who gave her away, as well as Elizabeth, were as happy as if the young ranger's bride had been their own daughter.

Maria removed with her husband to St. Lawrence's Hill, where her small but pleasant habitation was quite as solitary as she

she wished it to be. She spent her time in useful occupations, and her apparent tranquillity inspired Edward with the pleasing hope that the lenient hand of Time would entirely heal her wounded mind.

But, alas! he was mistaken, for her sorrow was exhausted, but not removed, and led her, by slow and imperceptible degrees, towards her early grave. She continually discovered an agonizing difference between her mind and Edward's; and the more unspotted and perfect his was, the more reproachable and faulty her's appeared; and the tenderest affection that was ever felt by man seemed to her to proceed from that pity which a humane heart never refuses bestowing on an unfortunate, misguided creature; although he strove, by every means in his power, to prove, that he esteemed her as much as he loved her. His kindness was painful to her troubled mind, and the more assiduously he strove to remove every

every remembrance of painful events from her thoughts, the more did her unceasing sorrow strive to commemorate the recollection of them.

Some months after her marriage, she was seized with an excessive languor and weakness in all her limbs. Edward nursed her with the tenderness he felt for her, and strove, by all the means he could devise, to strengthen her body and cheer her mind.

"I have but one wish, my dear Edward," said she, "and I own your granting it, before my eyes close for ever, as, perhaps, they soon may, would afford me pleasure."

Edward could not dry his, and a motion that he made with his hand gave her to understand that he would comply with her request, let it be what it would.

"My aunt Dempster," continued she, "is probably still in Woodmar's house;—I wish to have her about me in my last hours, and to bequeath her to you when

I die.

I die. She will manage your family in a manner that I am certain will meet with your approbation till you marry again; and should your future wife object to keeping her, you can send her to Conrad, who, I am sure, as well as his wife, will gladly consent to her living with them, on your paying a trifle for her board, which I am certain your affection for me will induce you to do. She quitted her comfortable situation in town for my sake, with the expectation of partaking the happiness that was promised me, and I was silly enough to expect; but, instead of that, she only shared my solitude, my tears, for the loss of a much-loved father, and my horror, on discovering the cruel deceit that had been practised to ensnare me! Will you write, and desire her to come to me?"

Edward did so, with inexpressible anguish.

"There is one thing more," said she, taking hold of his hand and drawing him towards

towards her, as soon as he had finished the letter. The moisture which had for some time been visible in her lovely eye, now collected itself into a large tear, which rolled down her emaciated and blushing cheek. "I have only one thing more on my mind;—but I will not do it on any account, without your permission and entire approbation. I feel that the time of my death is not very distant, and its approach makes me feel easier than I did at the time when I first perceived the declining state of my health. Perhaps Woodmar is the cause of my early death, perhaps not; but even supposing him to be so, it is certainly right, if it is in one's power, to mark and finish the evening of one's life with a good and generous action. Will you therefore permit me to write a few lines to him, to inform him of my forgiveness, and that I leave the world without execrating his name? Alas! I only detest him for your sake; for I have long forgiven the pain he caused me. If

you,

you, my dear Edward, think proper to grant this last request of mine, you will afford a sincere satisfaction to my heart, before it breaks: but if you do not think fit to do so, I will, without repining, sacrifice the transient pleasure it would have afforded me, and suppress a wish that your refusal will convince me is improper."

"How can you ask me such a question, Maria?" replied Edward, tenderly pressing her hand to his heart. "Do every thing, dearest, best beloved of women, that you think right, and will afford you any pleasure! Oh that I could die for you!"

Maria placed herself at the table which he set to rights, and after he had brought her pens, ink, and paper, he went out and strayed about the woods, to fly, if possible, from the dreadful phantoms that always harrowed his soul, whenever he thought of the possibility of Maria's death being near. The lonely sick chamber

ber was as quiet as her mind, and she was obliged to collect all her strength together to write the following letter;—

"My Lord,

"When you receive this, the hand that wrote it will probably be mouldering into dust, and the heart that loved you have ceased to beat, and enjoying the repose that it could only find in the grave. But before the chilling hand of death deprives me of the power, I wish to address myself once more to you, to assure you of my forgiveness. The solemn awful hour of death approaches with hasty strides, but I await its coming with calmness and composure, for it has assumed the shape of a guardian angel, that opens the gates of heaven for me. All this world afforded me was the short, but pleasing illusion of your love—the anguish of finding myself deceived—and tears!

tears! Even the unremitting tenderness of the best and most generous of men, can only afford me a double share of repentance, for deceiving him in the cruel manner I did, and making him the victim of my unfortunate love. I therefore willingly leave a world which appears like a dreary dungeon to my gloomy mind. But my heart is softened in these last hours of my life, and wishes to forgive, as it has been forgiven.

"Receive, therefore, with this last farewell, the assurance that I die reconciled to you. Nor will I conceal from you that the hatred and abhorrence that the discovery of your crime occasioned, weakened as my health declined, and——I will not pollute my dying lips with an untruth—my heart will carry your image, and its former love, with it into the grave.

"Live happy with the amiable and virtuous wife that Heaven has bestowed on you. May the remembrance of Maria never disturb your conjugal felicity nor cheer-

cheerfulness, but only restrain your levity, by representing to you the unfortunate consequences of it!

"I forgive you, and would say more, if the moments that I, in my own mind, determined to devote to you, were not passed, and every future one of my life belongs to Edward and my duty.

"Farewell, my Lord!—farewell for ever! In distant times, when your heart is truly converted to virtue, when you are weary of the world, and bowed down by age and infirmities, then Woodmar!—Oh how pleasing is the hope to your Maria!—then we shall meet again!"

She concluded this letter with much cheerfulness and composure of mind, sealed it herself, and gave it to Edward, with the request to send it to the Count immediately after her death.

Conrad

Conrad went with his cart as speedily as possible, to fetch Mrs. Dempster, and Elizabeth did not stir from the bedside of her much-loved suffering friend, and proved, by her unwearied assiduity, attentions, and sympathetic tears, how humane and good human nature can be, even without the varnish of education, which often takes from inward worth what it gives to outward polish.

Edward, whose tender, feeling heart was more warmly attached to Maria since he had found her again, than he was before their separation, perceived her increasing weakness with an anguish that almost bordered on distraction, and his only comfort consisted in the hope of soon following her to the grave. He hardly ever left her room, and anxiously watched, with alternate hope and fear, every movement of her's.

One evening she awoke from a more refreshing slumber than she had enjoyed

for some time; her eyes sparkled, she looked round her with innate satisfaction, and grasped hold of Edward's hand, who sat by her bedside.

"O my dear Edward!" said she, and the glory of beatification seemed to hover around her, and gave an almost celestial appearance to her pale cheeks and parched lips, "I have seen heaven, and my father and myself in it, in the most delightful dream I ever had in my life! Ah! how happy I felt in the society of the blessed! The earth lay like a dark cloud beneath my feet. I could not discern any of the dear friends I had left; and yet I so earnestly wished them to partake of the bliss I enjoyed! A column that was involved in a bluish mist, seemed to be let down from the world I was in to that I had before inhabited, and soon ascended again, much brighter than it was when it descended. Pleasing presages and doubts were mingled in my mind, but the latter were soon dispersed, by your stepping

out of the mist, and my father blessed our re-union.

"Some time after, the angel of forgiveness led Woodmar to me, and we all caught hold of each other's hands, and lived together in perfect union, which was not interrupted, nor censured by any one. We were then suddenly deprived of our present forms, which sunk into open graves; but our souls recognised and loved each other, without the cloathing of dust that they had hitherto worn."

Maria's eyes broke whilst the tears of joy still trembled in them; her lips retained a smile after they ceased to move, and, without the least agony, or convulsive motion, but gentle as the summer's breeze, did fleeting life escape her in Edward's arms.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXIV.

MRS. DEMPSTER arrived in time to attend her niece's funeral; and she, Conrad, and Elizabeth, wept together over the beloved corpse; but it was not in Edward's power to mingle his tears with theirs. His eyes were dry, and rolled wildly about; and violent as the anguish that raged in his bosom was, not a trace of it appeared in his countenance, that expressed horror and astonishment, more than grief, which is not unusually the first effect of a violent shock. He, with infinite trouble and expence, procured the permission to have

Maria buried under the oak where they first met after a long separation; that had before been his favourite seat, and was now so more than ever, as the remains of the dearest object he had on earth rested under its shade. He set a plain white marble urn upon her grave, and the only inscription it had was her name, the date of her birth, the day she died, and these few words—"Her death was as gentle as her mind."

He daily visited this sanctuary of his sorrow, and Conrad's children, who often strewed the grave of their departed friend with fresh-gathered flowers, frequently found him lying almost senseless upon it; sometimes in a kind of frantic despair; and at others nearly drowned in tears, which the soothing hand of Time, assisted by reflection, at length kindly sent to his relief. He led the same recluse and melancholy kind of life as he had done whilst he lamented Maria's having with-

withdrawn her love from him, and bestowed it on another who was unworthy of it: but his sensations were not quite so painful as at that time, for he at least had the satisfaction of knowing that she died his.

The thought of a second marriage never entered his head, and Mrs. Dempster managed his family with the same care and economy as Maria had done. Every thing that had belonged to her he regarded as a relic; and when he could do so without witnesses, he gave a loose to the excess of his sorrow, and plucked every flower that had sprung up in former times, to twine in the wormwood wreath of the present ones, or to strew them on the ruins of his lost happiness. He engraved Maria's name, times without number, on the bark of the oak under which she was buried, which rendered the much-loved tree doubly dear to him. There he generally spent some part of his even-

 ings,

ings, lost in reveries, which either painted to his imagination the happiness that awaited him on yon side of the grave, or recalled to his mind the happiness he had tasted in those halcyon days, when Maria first promised to be his. He often fancied that her spirit hovered invisibly about him, and at such times he always left his Maria's grave, as well as that of his earthly happiness, inspired with fresh courage to support the misfortunes that were irremediable.

He only survived Maria two years, and Mrs. Dempster soon followed him.

The letter that Maria had written to the Count was delivered to him a few days after her death. He had taken all imaginable pains to discover the place of her concealment; but as they proved vain, he returned to town exceedingly discontented and unhappy. He continued there; but lived in a very retired manner, without partaking of any of its amusements, or seeing

seeing any of his libertine acquaintance. His former vivacity had entirely forsaken him, and he continually viewed, in the mirror of retrospection, the confidence that Maria had placed in him, and how cruelly he had abused it. He had often, since the time he had parted so angrily from Josephine, thought of that amiable woman with interest and pity, but he had not seen her again. The unjust reproaches he had loaded her with in that hour often recurred to his mind; but, as is generally the case with faulty people, he wished, and strove to lessen his crime, by tracing the origin of it, not in his own heart, from whence it really sprung, but in that of the person who was a sufferer by it.

Conscience frequently slumbers, but it never takes its flight entirely from the human mind; and although the dissipated and worthless may long swim on a sea of delight, without reflecting on what they have done, the awful hour comes at last,

that shews them their crimes in their full deformity. At such times, to silence the stings of self-reproach that torment them, they anxiously strive to discover even the smallest fault in the character of those they have injured, to excuse themselves.

Woodmar had remarked, with extreme dissatisfaction, the frigidity and haughtiness with which the Countess had treated him; but as he did not love her, the distance that the difference in their way of thinking placed between them was, at least in his opinion, a great excuse for the preference he gave to Maria, and his continuing his connexion with her. He esteemed Josephine as her worth deserved, and repented having pained her gentle mind by the harshness of his behaviour; but he did not feel any particular desire to see her again; and indeed the painful suspense he suffered on Maria's account, had hitherto made every thing that re-

garded the Countess but a secondary consideration.

Sad-presaging fears seized hold of his mind, when he received Maria's letter, and saw his name on the superscription in her hand-writing. He laid it down unopened, and strove to persuade himself that his apprehensions were vain, and that its contents were of a pleasing nature.

"Perhaps she has pardoned me!" said he to himself; and in that he guessed right; but he little thought she did so at the gates of eternity, and not in this imperfect state, which he had rendered a vale of misery to her.

But when he opened the letter, the crooked lines, and almost unintelligible writing, convinced him that it had cost her all her little remains of strength; but when he read it—and, in a kind of stupefaction, read it over and over again, he was seized with all the horrors

of

of the blackest despair. Maria dead, and his accuser at the throne of judgment! were thoughts that he was unable to separate, much as her mild and voluntary pardon contradicted the latter of them. The continual anguish of his mind affected his health, and brought on a dangerous fit of sickness, from which he slowly recovered.

Life, however, had no charms for him, and death was what he alike wished for, and feared. But the gloomy melancholy that had taken possession of his mind remained undiminished, till he received a circumstantial account of Maria's last hours, which a little relieved his sufferings, and changed his anguish into a deep and lasting sorrow, which never wore off.

"O Maria!" exclaimed he, some months after her death, "the best monument I can erect to thy memory will be to do as much good as is in my power,

and

and perform my duty as conscientiously as I can. How can I honour thy dust better than by striving to become worthy of thee!"

The idea of Josephine at that moment presented itself to his agitated mind: he recollected the tears that his unkindness had forced into her lovely eyes, and to dry them he resolved should be his first endeavour and chief study, for which purpose he determined to go to her immediately.

Josephine had lived quite retired at Woodmar Castle since their separation, and devoted all her time and attentions to her dear infant, in whom all her happiness was now comprised. His name, and the extreme gentleness of his disposition, continually reminded her of the first object of her love, as the strong resemblance of his features to his father's, did of the second, and prevented her from forgetting, even for a moment, that she

she had irrecoverably lost them both.—Alas! the prejudices of birth and fortune had deprived her of the one, and the knowledge of his unworthiness of the other.

The Count arrived at Woodmar Castle, and was received by the Countess with cold ceremony and solemn dignity.

"I have offended you, Josephine," said he; "but the unfortunate cause of our dissention is no more. She died, and pardoned me with her latest breath.—Will you not imitate the example of her forgiveness?"

He stopped as soon as he had pronounced those words, and presented Maria's letter to her.

Josephine took it with a look of apparent indifference, but its contents softened her heart, and made her eyes overflow with the tribute of pity for the unfortunate Maria. She turned hastily towards her husband, and said, with a firm

and

and determined look, as she gave him the letter back, although the tremor of her voice proved how violently her mind was agitated, and the difficulty she had to suppress her tears—

"This letter is our divorce! and the only damages I require for the sorrows you have occasioned me, is the permission to keep my child, and to be allowed to superintend his education, that I may preserve his heart from the vices that stain his father's!"

Her cheeks glowed with noble indignation; she hurried out of the room as soon as she had pronounced those words, to conceal her emotion, and never saw her husband again.

The Countess performed her maternal duties with the most conscientious care and exactness; the amiableness of her son's disposition, and the goodness of his heart (which were copied from and matured by her example), richly rewarded her pains; in

in him she found a recompence for her unmerited sufferings.

Woodmar, after several other vain attempts to effect a reconciliation with Josephine, which he very much wished to do, retired to Nettlefield, where every object he saw reminded him of Maria; and there he might truly be said to riot in "the sad luxury of woe." He sometimes endeavoured to cheer his desponding mind by travelling; but the transient intermission from pain, which that at times afforded, was merely a kind of delirium, that was always quickly succeeded by new torments, caused by the recollection of the past, and apprehension of the future.

He strove to divert his grief by acts of benevolence, and they sometimes afforded him a temporary pleasure, but could not remove his uneasiness, it having taken such deep root in his mind that nothing but death could eradicate it, which, however, did not come to his relief

lief till after a long life, that was one continued scene of suffering, pain, and discontent.

"But what became of Augustus Wilmot?" is a question I think I hear my readers ask. He did not forget his first and unfortunate attachment, but it at length changed, by slow degrees, into a firm and lasting friendship, that he retained for Josephine as long as he lived. Years were however necessary to extinguish the blaze of passion that raged in his bosom; but when that desirable event took place, another flame glowed in its stead, that did not require concealment like the first, but which he durst freely and proudly avow to the whole world, and whose pure and genial warmth was highly pleasing to Josephine.

Love likewise claimed its empire in his heart some years after, and rewarded his former sufferings with a maiden, his equal in birth, but his superior in fortune, and endowed with every accomplishment ne-

cessary to render him happy. He did not see Josephine again till after his marriage, and then the remembrance of the past was no longer painful to them, but merely tempered the pleasure of meeting, after so long an absence, with a soft melancholy, which more strongly cemented their friendship.

Mrs. Wilmot, as well as Augustus and his family, always spent some of the summer months at Woodmar Castle, and the serenity they enjoyed in the noon and evening of life entirely erased from Wilmot's and Josephine's minds the remembrance of the storms that had clouded their morning prospects.

END OF VOL. I.

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